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Perceiving and portraying

Rudolf Arnheim

E. H. GOMBRICH

The Image and the Eye: Further studies in the psychology of pictorial representation
320pp, Oxford: Phaidon, £18.
0 7148 2245 0

When art historians and critics deal with art objects as visual images they rely inescapably on psychology. Heinrich Wölfflin made use of the principle of empathy in his dissertation on architecture. Roger Fry lectured psychoanalysts on how not to interpret art. Erwin Panofsky speculated on the perceptual aspects of retinal projection in his study of perspective. The psychology used for such purposes was often home-made, based on common-sense beliefs that happened to be in the air; and to some extent this could not be avoided because psychology had not developed the tools needed for such application.

A very different situation prevails in the body of work that E. H. Gombrich has given us during the past two decades or so. His book *Art and Illusion* had greatly increased his interest in visual perception, and he went out of his way to look for problems, solutions and laboratory findings in the publications of experimental psychologists. His impressive knowledge of the professional literature in that field has made him an expert with whom specialists in visual perception talk shop. He gives them the shock of recognition, even though his voice remains that of the art historian.

The present volume is the sixth collection of Gombrich's papers. So ample is the output and so pervasive is the approach that by now there is hardly a fact or theory for which he cannot refer back to an earlier piece of his writing. These many references act like lines holding together an edifice of great consistency, and although the buildings can be entered by many doors, one will receive a good sense of the whole at any access. This latest collection, like *Art and Illusion*, concerns 'the psychology of pictorial representation'. Coming from an art historian, this amounts to an extension of the study of works of art to the broader field of picture-making in general - an extension that Gombrich expects not so much to show that the particular quality we call art can be found also in the more secular varieties of pictures but rather to point out that

nothing essential distinguishes works of art from pictorial representation for other purposes. Even this more limited version of his 'ecumenical initiative', however, is welcome and fruitful.

The new collection of essays deals with such topics as the discovery of unexpected features in the visual world, the perception and representation of movement, communication through images and

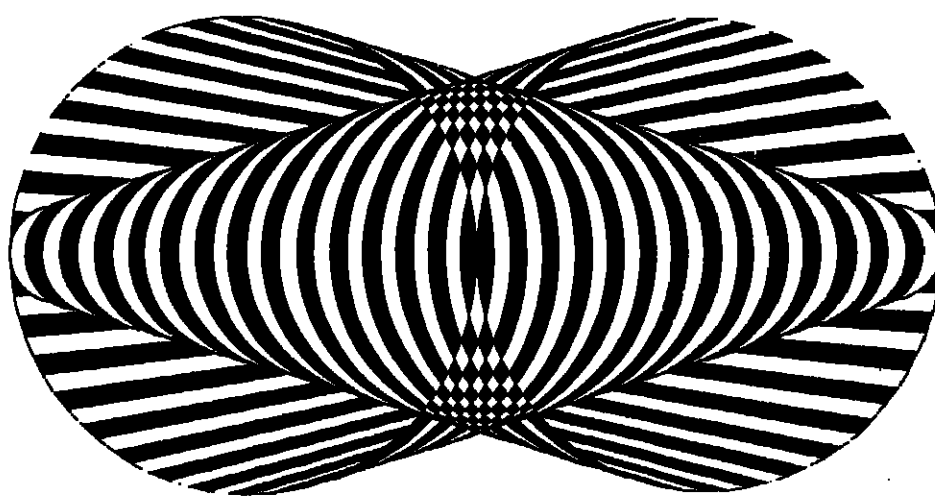
two principal versions. One of them, introduced by the art historian Alois Riegl, holds that different attitudes towards the experience of human existence make for different styles, no one of which is better than the other. More radically, there is, in the view of a school of philosophical sceptics, no objective validity to any one statement on reality since they are all purely conventional.

skills towards the attainment of a given artistic goal he uses the increasing mystery of realistic representation and thereby suggests a one-sided parallel to the goals of science. The inversely oriented striving of Byzantine art to free itself gradually from Roman naturalism, for example, would show that the comparison of art with science cannot rely on such simple similarity of objectives. In the same vein Gombrich

of Kenneth Clark's book on the nude in art, which made me marvel at the author's proficiency in discovering anatomical inaccuracies in works of various periods - a head too small or legs too long. I checked back, and in fact the deviations were correctly diagnosed. I had never noticed them, not because I was ignorant of human proportions but because I had not looked at artistic statements on the human figure as though they were those figures themselves. From this different viewpoint, naturalistic art is not the final consummation but a risky conjunction in which art and nature are in danger of being confused.

In discussing some basic phenomena of visual perception Gombrich treats pictures as the reverberations of experiences gathered in the physical world. This is evident when he deals with the question of how movement is represented in the immobile media of art. He asserts that if the perception both of the visible world and of images were not a process in time, it could not 'arouse in us the memories and anticipations of movement'. But only percepts of real locomotion are processes in time, whereas the recourse to the past and the future phases of movement is a mere expedient to save the belief that movement can be represented in pictures only by memories of locomotion. For this same reason Gombrich asserts that 'the understanding of movement depends on the clarity of meaning', that is, on the identification of the given image with instances of actual motion in the past. It would seem to me necessary to realize that a timeless medium excludes motion in principle. Only then does one come to see that the visual dynamics inherent in the shapes and relations of images create an equivalent of movement. This explanation, however, is dismissed by Gombrich as belonging to the 'commonplaces of criticism' and as 'not quite easy to account for'.

Elsewhere also one notices a basic distrust of what an image offers toward by itself. Throughout the book the emphasis is on the multiplicity of meanings for which pictures can stand. Their flexibility of appearance, their ambiguity, and their need for explanatory context and verbal comment. These observations are certainly pertinent and well illustrated. But nowhere do we receive the corresponding and equally necessary insistence on the precision and stability



An illustration of figure-ground organization based on an ambiguous cylinder defined by intersecting circles, reproduced from Nicholas Wade's *The Art and Science of Visual Illusions* (293pp, Routledge and Kegan Paul, £19.95, 0 7100 0868 6) which will be published on November 18.

The other version of this counter-thesis derives from Gestalt psychology and holds that perception is controlled by organizational principles which regulate the structure of visual images and that any medium of representation, such as painting or sculpture, has definite properties which determine how images are shaped and what makes them most effective. Gombrich has presented impressive examples to support the more historical version of this counter-thesis, but he has barely begun seriously to consider the more perceptual one. Either way the difference of views is fundamental and the struggle between them an intellectual treat of the first order.

In defence of naturalism Gombrich confesses to the 'parochial' view that our own heritage from the Greeks and the Renaissance is superior to other cultures in that it prepared the bases for the natural sciences and thereby promoted the perfection of 'recognizable images'. When he discusses the evolution of progressive

We are faced here with the view that the perception of nature and that of art are basically similar and that of art are coincidence in highly naturalistic styles was the final consummation of art's function. This is puzzling to anybody accustomed to approaching pictures, especially art, not as statements about that experience, a world of their own with totally different rules on what represents what. In his present book Gombrich uses once again the example of early woodcuts in which vertically oriented table-tops look 'to us' as though the plates and pitchers must slide off. This reviewer confesses that no such thought had ever crossed his mind. I had to recall a recent re-reading

concludes his book with the assertion that naturalism enabled the Western artist 'to do with fewer and fewer conventions'. He does not take into account that the violent distortions of central perspective, the shift from abstract essentials to the accidentals of appearance, etc., required fundamental accommodations.

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European Studies in Social Psychology
Co-publication with the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris

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that distinguishes the vast majority of visual images and on the perceptual conditions responsible for such stability.

Similarly, the depth effect of central perspective is explained in the present book not by its reliance on perceptual features of the image, such as oblique orientation, deformation of shape, and alteration of size but by its resemblance to the optical projections received by the eyes from physical space.

Gombrich insists on "rigidly objective standards" of linear perspective although he certainly knows that, for example, in one-point perspective frontal surfaces are neither tilted nor curved as optical projection would require and that verticals are exempted from convergence.

What enables us to understand gestures? What makes us "see the tenseness of the throwing arm" when we look at the photograph of a hunter? That tension, we are told, is not inherent in the image. It is a mere inference from what and such knowledge evokes kinesthetic tension in the viewer's body. This is a return to the old theory of empathy. Gombrich believes that bodily expression must be either symptom or convention, i.e. can be understood only by what we conclude from its physical or mental origin or by the meaning attributed to it through our culture. The image itself is not allowed to speak — at least not in theory, for in practice there are ample indications of Gombrich's fine sensitivity to the language of vision.

In one chapter of the present book our author does indeed turn, for the explanation of a phenomenon of vision, to perceptual organization. He refers to "that principle of simplicity that pervades our perceptual processes and that has been so thoroughly explored

by the Gestalt school of psychology". In fact, the tendency towards simplest structure tells us why among all the images compatible with a given projection a particular one imposes itself upon the viewer. Past experience, says Gombrich, does not suffice to explain this. As we read on, however, we realize that the meaning of "simplicity" as here intended is not that of Gestalt psychology after all but refers to past experience once again. Simple is what is likely to be the case, "so safe a bet under normal circumstances that we can take it as a clue".

What are we to make of all this? Is this approach merely a late fruit of traditional British empiricism? Or is the historian inclined to assume that the present is nothing but the sum of outcomes transmitted from the past? I referred in the beginning to the counter-thesis, equally characteristic of Gombrich's presentation, according to which there is no "innocent eye". In *Art and Illusion* he held "that the painter's starting point can never be the observation and imitation of nature, that all art remains what is called conceptual...". This view is hard to reconcile with all the references to direct experience on which his theories of perception are based but it is in keeping with the belief that images are not what nature brings to man but what man brings to nature. In this mood Gombrich describes the manifestations of visual expression as conventions. "Indeed, what else could they be, if they are to serve communication between human beings?"

The consequences of this rhetorical question are brought home to him, however, when he finds himself face to face with the kind of desperate

relativist who is willing to state that a square is as good a likeness of the full moon as a circle since representations are nothing but arbitrary conventions. It is here that Gombrich rises to the defence of the visual image and its inherent truthfulness, to which even animals respond — an image shaped by simplification and abstraction, to be sure, and by the conventions of pictorial styles, but nature's message nevertheless. Although even the design of commercial fishing lures has changed from nineteenth-century naturalism to the abstract shapes of a Miro, Klee, and Matisse, the fish are still biting. It is from this secure basis that Gombrich's future work should be able to proceed.

From the present volume of essays human picture-making emerges as a clever but not as an admirable performance. I could not think of a more appealing source of information on the intricate mechanisms and the use of accumulated assets by which the organism copes with the obstacles to reliable sensory cognition. But we hear little about wisdom by which the creative wisdom by which the visual image, in art and elsewhere, grasps the essentials and renders them through the properties of a given medium of representation. The true pleasure of the book comes from Gombrich's unrivalled talent for offering his arguments with an enviable blend of Viennese wit and English concreteness. An inexhaustible store of illustrations, anecdotes, and historical facts and the fencing skill of a seasoned debater are presented with that effortless charm which Baldassare Castiglione recommended to his courtiers as *grazia*, the most indispensable virtue, he thought, of a civilized person.

"Spatially Frequent", an illustration taken from *The Art and Science of Visual Illusions* by Nicholas Wade (publication details on page 1179).

The suburban landscapes

John House

PAUL HAYES TUCKER
Monet at Argenteuil
211pp. Yale University Press. £15.
0 300 02577 7

Argenteuil, a town on the Seine downstream from Paris, was Monet's home from 1871 to 1878, through the years of the Impressionist group exhibitions; many of his friends visited him and painted there. So much is well known: in the histories the place is treated as the backdrop for narratives of the struggles of the Impressionist group against poverty and incomprehension. Some of this has already been called into question: we now know, from his own account books, that Monet earned a reasonable living from his art throughout his time at Argenteuil; and the collected reviews of the first group exhibition in 1874 show that the critics, almost without exception, made serious attempts to understand their art.

Now it is the turn of Argenteuil to take the centre of the stage alongside Monet. Paul Hayes Tucker's study *Monet at Argenteuil* examines Monet's paintings in relation to the history and topography of the place itself. At Argenteuil, Monet was surrounded by the visual evidence of metamorphosis: an old country town being overtaken by suburbanization and industrialization. His paintings depict many of the key elements in this changing scene — the regattas, the railway bridge, factory chimneys queuing the skyline, new houses and roads alongside the old. Tucker's account draws heavily on local archives, augmented by a wide range of material from contemporary periodicals, about Argenteuil, and about the more general issues raised by Paris's suburban expansion. The documentation is rich and ample, mixed only by small verbal errors, particularly in French, and by one remarkable Latin howler.

The result is in many ways a delightful book. Monet's Argenteuil comes to life in its pages in a way it never can in the drab, industrial semi-wasteland of present-day Argenteuil. Moreover, the new perspectives it offers on Monet's paintings are always refreshing, and will, one trusts, silence for ever the claim that the subjects the Impressionists painted were unimportant or only as the raw material for pictorial experiment.

These last-mentioned two stages in his argument raise theoretical and practical problems. Any attempt to attribute meanings to forms must involve assumptions both about how these meanings can be located, and about whether a work of art has an unchanging core of significance, or varying significance, according to when and by whom it is seen, and in what context. Moreover, even if it is central, as Tucker seems to do, that this is the direct expression of the artist's state of mind or of his world view.

Tucker does not confront these issues; his account is in essence an exercise in practical criticism, using the social context of the works as the yardstick. Although it is from this pragmatic side that his arguments should be carefully examined, even so, theoretical issues are involved. In discussing individual pictures, he recognizes the crucial fact that the constituent ingredients of a painting cannot be seen in piecemeal, but have to be seen in combination, in the picture. In Monet's canvases, factory chimneys may closely parallel tree trunks or a church spire; raw nature may be set beside the marks of man's intervention; sail boats may be dropped to the foreground of a bridge. Such internal relationships are integral to any attempt to find meaning in a painting, and Tucker describes them

most perceptively; the problems arise at the next stage, in the passage from description to interpretation.

For Tucker, the forms of a particular picture, juxtaposed with the documented social reality of the setting depicted, are the raw material of interpretation, but the terms in which such readings can be made are never clarified. The difficulties arise on two levels. First, the qualities found in the pictures often seem to project more of the experiential framework of the twentieth-century viewer than of the nineteenth-century painter. Terms like "tension", "anxiety", "strain", "vulnerable" and "introverted" bear no evident relation to Monet's own ways of experiencing nature, so far as we can determine them, and no attempt is made to articulate the analyses in terms which would have been within the conceptual framework of a nineteenth-century viewer. Nor are these terms claimed to belong to any more universal system of analysis. The second problem is that the external terms of reference are almost entirely restricted to the social reality of the setting of the pictures. They are never located in relation to the other determinants of their form and appearance, essentially questions of picture composition, attitudes to colour and brushwork and to the question of imagery used, not in the geographical setting at Argenteuil, but in relation to pictorial traditions in landscape painting. Only passing mention is made, too, of Monet's prospective patrons and the market for which he was working. The paintings, as Tucker clearly shows, do reflect their social milieu, but, as acts of self-conscious picture-making within a particular tradition of easel painting, they demand an analysis wider in its terms of reference.

At times Tucker glances outside his self-imposed limits and provides fascinating observations, such as his comparison between Jean on the Mechanical Horse and Velázquez's "Infante Don Baltasar Carlos on Horseback". Monet's painting clearly is a reference (perhaps ironic) to the tradition of child equestrian portraiture; but is Tucker right to interpret this socially, and claim that Monet and his middle-class contemporaries, with their new money, land and success, were using the form of the aristocrat of old to signify their own newly attained status? Hence, wherever in the

book, one senses an undeclared allegiance to a form of Marxist analysis which sees a painting as essentially a mirror, or an evasion, of social reality, saying even a relative autonomy to the traditions of picture-making within which Monet's work must also be seen.

Further problems arise when Tucker moves from individual pictures to locate Monet's own point of view. He seeks a core of self-expression, within the artist's state of mind, behind the great diversity of Monet's depictions of Argenteuil. In contrast to the "tension" and "anxiety" of "The Vineyards in the Snow", vineyards about to be swept away by the growth of the town — he finds in "The Garden in the Snow" a statement of "what Monet wanted for himself". Elsewhere, though, we find Monet able to celebrate the march of progress. After the "uneasiness and isolation" of a river-scene of 1874, the "exuberance" (sic) of two river-scenes of 1875 has to reflect "the world of romance and poetry that he wanted Argenteuil to be", though "by 1875 it was evident that Argenteuil was not such a place". Finally, the structure of the garden scenes with figures of 1873 suggests "domestic difficulties" and "familial estrangement".

One may disagree, subjectively, with Tucker's reading of individual paintings (such as "The Vineyards in the Snow"); but the crucial question is the more general one, whether he is justified in moving from picture to painting. Does the mood of each picture somehow reflect Monet's mood? Here again Tucker seems to be hamstrung by his limited terms of reference. Monet's solutions in individual paintings beg to be related to contemporary debates in artistic circles, especially about the relationship between sketch and finish, and about the aesthetic of modernity. Tucker is little concerned with questions of process and working method. Parts of occasional paintings are described as unfinished, but he does not recognize that several of the paintings he discusses (such as XIX and XX) are *esquisse* (sketches) complete in their own terms but not finished enough to be considered (*tableaux*), and that the qualities which he sees as characteristics of the *esquisse*, as lauded by painters and writers of the time, vigorous bold execution which translates the painter's first ideas and experience.

Questions about the aesthetic of modernity raised by Tucker's treatment of the figure paintings of Argenteuil elsewhere in the

1873. He compares them with Manet and Tissot, but without recognizing that all three artists, rather than expressing a personal mood, were searching along parallel lines for compositional structures which would express the characteristics of modern life. Details of the milieu in which they painted are relevant to this, but too is the "passionate observer" of Baudelaire's *Painter of Modern Life*, absorbed in the diverse appearances of the scene around him, but retaining his impartiality and his incoherence. The immense variety of Monet's Argenteuil paintings and the painter's detachment from his subject, suggested by the physical viewpoint he favoured, can far more easily be accommodated within a Baudelairean framework than in a search for personal expressiveness. The plot itself had many facets and contrasting moods; these Monet explored, but the moods of the paintings are not the moods of the painter.

At the beginning of *Monet at Argenteuil* Tucker quotes a remarkable passage from Frédéric Chévalier's review of the 1877 Impressionist exhibition:

The disturbing ensemble of contradictory qualities... which distinguish... the Impressionists... the crude application of paint, the down-to-earth subjects... the appearance of spontaneity... the conscious incoherence, the bold colours, the contempt for form, the childish naïveté, that they mix heedlessly with exquisite refinements... all of this is without analogy to the chaos of contradictory forces that trouble our era.

This text suggests, in the critical language of the day, how Monet's paintings at one and the same time could be expressions of modernity and the pioneers of a new type of picture-making; a comprehensive account of Monet at Argenteuil will have to pursue all the strands in Chévalier's account in a way that Tucker does not, to see how they converge to produce these paintings.

But why did Monet leave modern Argenteuil for the true countryside at Vétheuil, to embark on a course which was to lead him to the exclusive focus on colour and atmosphere? Tucker's concluding sentence is very apt: "Here [at Vétheuil] Monet could be at home in front of his motif, pursuing the dialectic of vision and nature".

JOHN HAFENDEN
The Life of John Berryman
466pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
£15.
0 7100 9216 4

EILEEN SIMPSON
Poets in their Youth
280pp. Faber. £10.50.
0 517 11925 5

Even by his own exacting standards, January 29, 1963 must have seemed to John Berryman an eventful day. At 8 am a visit from Delmore Schwartz, who had come by taxi all the way from Cambridge, Massachusetts to Providence, Rhode Island and ordered the driver to wait outside. The last time he had seen Schwartz, three months previously, Berryman had rescued him from the jail where he was being held on a drunkenness charge. Now here he was pacing up and down the room, refusing food, coffee or "even a drink" then leaving as abruptly and inexplicably as he'd arrived. Berryman was distressed by the visit, seeing it as further evidence that the "electric" companion of his youth had gone into an unrelenting decline. But he had scarcely time to get over it before another friend, Daniel Hughes, arrived with the news that Robert Frost had died. This time the reaction was brisk and self-interested: "Dan, it's scary. Who's number one? Who's number one? Cal [Robert Lowell] is number one, isn't he?" This was Berryman's way of saying that if Lowell wasn't (as he hoped he wasn't), then he must be.

There could hardly be a more vivid demonstration of those warring spirits in Berryman, the Fierce Competitor and the Loyal Friend. It was his fate, when the success of *77 Dream Songs* (1964) and *His Toy, His Dream, His Her* (1968) briefly brought him the fame he'd long craved, to be cast in the role of more sensational roles: drunk, womanizer, manic depressive. But his driving obsession was the knowledge that his friends and broses, whom he dearly wanted to prosper, were also his literary rivals, whose successes threatened to put his own in the shade. In life he expressed this ambivalence through his use of the word "pal", which he managed to make sound both affectionate and intimidating, jovial and aggressive. It is a form of address which Henry, in the *Dream Songs*, also employs:

-Has you the night sweats & the day sweats, pal?

-Pal I do.

-Did you gal leave you? — What do you think pal?

-Is that thing on the front of your head what it seems to be, pal?

-Yes, pal.

In death — that is, as he watched friend after friend go to an early grave — the ambivalence was voiced through elegies which weep and wail while also jostling for a place in the pantheon:

The high ones die, die. They die. You look up and who's there?

I am cross with god who has wrecked this generation.

First he seized Ted, then Richard, Randall, and now Delmore.

In between he gorged on Sylvia Plath. That was a first rate haul.

"Cross" sounds too arch even for so Audenese a poet as Berryman, but, like "Hurrah! (Alas)" in another *Dream Song*, is a pivot for conflicting feelings. Much as he mourned the deaths of Roethke, Blackmur, Jarrell, Schwartz, Flaubert and son on, he knew that the honour he sought, that of Greatest Living American Writer, was a "cross" with god but — he had to be frank about this — he had to be devastated. On the other hand, what was the prize worth if one's friends weren't there at the party to give you their accolade? In 1958 Berryman asked Howard Nemerov: "If you ever decided it big, would you want to be the only one? Out there in front all man and even there, amidst all the pushing and one catches a note of genuine dread: 'all by yourself' — no, perhaps being top dog wasn't worth that."

Berryman had ample opportunity to ponder the pitfalls of ultimate success since for most of his life there seemed not the slightest prospect of his being embarrassed by them. His debut at twenty-six, in an anthology called *Five Young American Poets*, was profoundly unimpressive; only Randall Jarrell for distinguished company (where now are the other three, Mary Barnard, W. R. Moses and George Marion O'Donnell?) and \$6.25 first year's royalties. At thirty-four, firing off advance copies of his first full-length collection, *The Dispossessed*, to Pound, Stevens and others, he sat back and waited to be famous: nothing happened. As his first wife Eileen Simpson recalls, on publication day there was "no celebratory party, no mail, no phone calls, no copies in bookstores"; and when reviews eventually came they were at best tepid, and in Yvor Winters' case icy: "Most of his poems appear to deal with a single all-inclusive topic: the desperate chaos, social, religious, philosophical and psychological, of modern life, and the corresponding chaos and desperation of John Berryman." Berryman was forty-two before *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* won him the praise of fellow-poets and critics, and fifty, with only eight more years to live, when the Pulitzer Prize-winning *77 Dream Songs* made him known to a wider public. He has been called a late starter but unlike many of that breed he was writing prolifically throughout his life; more accurately he was a fast finisher, coming up on the Schwartzes and Roethkes, and into his own, as they ran out of steam.

Once successful, Berryman was able to convince himself that it had actually been "beneficial" to him to have been kept from success for so long; it had stopped his gift from drying up too soon, as it had dried up for Delmore Schwartz, and as it was to dry up for Berryman himself before the end. Even in the darkest years he kept hoping. The same self-deluding logic that persuaded him that alcoholism nourished his writing and that "heading for friends' wives or girls is really a way of getting closer to friends" also furnished him with evidence that, against all the evidence, he would finally come good. "All I want is time and I will be a great poet still!" he recorded in his diary for 1948. But this stopped his gift from drying up too soon, as it had dried up for Delmore Schwartz, and as it was to dry up for Berryman himself before the end. Even in the darkest years he kept hoping. 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1954. In a diary, he talks of going to Minnesota "to tear him to pieces, to get square, to even the score with him". The tone here very much that of Sylvia Plath in "Daddy", a poet with whom he had much in common (dead father, strong mother, the notion of being "an imaginary Jew"). Through psychoanalysis and encounter-groups, Berryman evolved elaborate theories about the damage done to him, then belatedly overturned these when in 1970 he decided that his self-pity had perhaps been in error and that he had taken his father's death "in stride".

This confident theorizing was in strong contrast to the circumstances of the death itself, which always remained something of a mystery to Berryman, and remain so still to John Haffenden and Eileen Simpson. Why did Smith suddenly resign his post in a bank the previous September? How serious were the financial difficulties he ran into when the family moved to Florida? Did he really have an affair with "a Cuban woman", and who was she, and was it true that he gave her "every last nickel"? Did he, as family legend said, try to drown John and his brother by swimming out too far with them? When did John's mother, Martha, begin her affair with John Angus Berryman, whom she married within a few weeks of Smith's death? If a divorce between Martha and Smith was pending, was this because of John Angus, "the Cuban woman", or something else? Why in his last days did Martha allow her husband to wander up and down the beach with a gun in his hand and then, eventually taking action, bury only five of the six bullets? Was the story she told that Smith killed himself accidentally while cleaning the gun something she genuinely believed or a censored version for strangers? Berryman said that Smith "left no note", a newspaper report that there was one referring to insomnia and "terrible headaches" — which is true?

These are mysteries indeed, though there is no great mystery as to why they remain unsolved. For the only real source of information about Smith's death was Martha, for whom the circumstances seem to have been part of an ever-changing myth. Both books agree on this, though not on the reasons for it: Haffenden, who interviewed Martha when she was eighty, speaks of her poor and failing memory; Mrs Simpson thinks that Martha's differing versions, which she would supply her inquisitive son in three or four-page letters, were an attempt to steer a perilous mid-course, since she needed on the one hand to exculpate herself by presenting Smith as unstable and cowardly, and on the other hand to persuade John that his father (and therefore himself as his father's son) was a man of worth, someone to look up to, though frail.

There is no doubt that this latter explanation is the more convincing, if it fits with the picture both books give of Martha Berryman as a vain, fickle, deeply ambitious woman, much prone to invention (she liked to tell business colleagues that Berryman was her younger brother), possessive and overbearing in the treatment of her son. What neither book contemplates, though between them they give enough detail for it to be discerned, is the possibility that Martha's part in Smith's death was very large indeed and that she bombarded John with new facts and interpretations in order to divert him from a terrifyingly plausible train of events: that Martha, her marriage with Smith long since a failure, had fallen in love with John Angus and asked for a divorce; that Smith refused,

became depressed and, more in self-pity than genuine resolve, threatened to kill himself with his wife's 32 pistol; that Martha confiscated the gun and let Smith see her removing the bullets from it, though in fact one still remained; that Smith later got the gun back and in an empty flourish pulled the trigger, thus leaving Martha free to marry John Angus, funeral bak'd meats furnishing forth the marriage table. It was as well Berryman chose to work on an edition of *King Lear* not *Hamlet*, and that he was not a fan of Agatha Christie. He might otherwise have penetrated even beyond this interpretation of Smith's death to what a local newspaper called "several points" in the case that interfered with the whole suicide theory — not least the facts that there were no powder burns on Smith (unavoidable in suicide cases) and that it was Martha who had found the body.

The more one looks into such aspects of Berryman's life, the more one understands why Haffenden and Mrs Simpson are able to explain so little. Sometimes, it is true, there can be no excuse for the uncertainties and contradictions: surely it is possible to establish whether, when Berryman himself jumped to his death from the Washington Avenue Bridge, he fell on to the lead-over Mississippi (Mrs Simpson), or by a pier on the embankment (Haffenden), or on frozen rocks (Joel Conarroe in a critical book of 1977). But for every case like this there are ten where the biographer is in possession of the facts but has been obstructed from saying all that he or she would like. Behind Haffenden's book, in particular, float the spectres of libel suits, angry correspondences and wounded feelings, of relatives who don't want to come out of the book badly and of lovers who don't want to come out at all. This presumably explains the troubled history of the book. It began as the "official" Life, to be published by Faber, and was in an advanced state of preparation when extracts from it appeared in the *New Review* in 1976.

Yet it appears only now, and from a different publisher, and without the status of an "official" Life. Haffenden says, nothing about this difficulties he has experienced; only that "to avoid offence to persons still living, I have omitted some facts". Berryman's mistresses, for instance, appear in various truncated forms — Christian names (Elisbeth), pseudonyms ("Beatrice"), first-name initials (J. and S.), or even simply "a woman who...". And when, having otherwise been meticulous about months and even days, Haffenden suddenly becomes vague about the date of Berryman's divorce and second marriage ("in 1956") and the birth of his son ("in 1957"), quoting a letter that reveals Berryman's anguish and frustration at the slowness of his divorce: in coming through, we are likely to wonder, rightly or wrongly, whether Berryman married his second wife when she was expecting a child. Haffenden's book, in other words, is necessarily a compromise, forced to certain lines while allowing his audience to read between them. It is clear that some people refused to talk to him at all, and that others who did have since thought the better of it.

One of these appears to be Eileen Simpson herself, who when the *New Review* extracts were published, was being owed "a special debt of gratitude" by Haffenden, but who is not included among the literally hundreds of people who are thanked here. A rift of some sort between researcher and researched is the likely explanation for the discrepancies between those original extracts and what is now printed in the corresponding chapters on Berryman in the 1940s: apart from one or two references to misadventures involving members of the Berryman family, nearly all of the thirty or so dropped passages allude to "Mrs Simpson's relationship with her first husband. The omitted material, much of it taken from the same private diaries which Haffenden draws on throughout his book, includes an erotic letter written by Berryman before their marriage, numerous references to Eileen's poor state of health and mind — she is "ill", "dizzy and nauseated", "weeping" and in "desperate grief", an incident in which Berryman consults a clinic about "an infection of his penis", and above all allusions to the "rows", "anxiety", "difficulties" and "distraction" in the relationship. The

version that's left is skimpier and more anodyne than the original. This is Haffenden's present account of the twenty-eight-year-old Berryman's short spell as an encyclopaedia salesman:

For several hours each day he tramped the streets of New York's East Side without reward; he felt hopeless and degraded, and resigned the job after a week.

When he declared to Eileen that he hated life, she argued that people who do so should not get married.

Aggrieved, after eight weeks of job-hunting in New York, exhausted and terrified, Berryman took stock of their hopeless situation. Undernourished, he was sleeping very badly and suffering from indigestion, and the burning and itching of his scalp depressed him.

The original account has more to say about Eileen and the marriage:

For several hours each day he tramped the streets of New York's East Side without reward; he felt savage, hopeless, and degraded. Eileen was reduced to a state of desperate weeping. After a week he resigned his job. On Monday 26 July, he wrote in his diary:

Home, hysteria. . . Chaos, blasphemy uncontrollable — Eileen's desperate grief. . . I never had a home of my own. . . I never had anybody who loved me.

I never had a moment's happiness before I met you. . . I will never forget her voice as she said these things, God help her and give her some part of the happiness she deserves for her courage & goodness & devotion.

A day later, Berryman declared to Eileen that he hated life; she argued that people who do so should not get married.

Aggrieved, after eight weeks of job-hunting in New York, exhausted and terrified, Berryman took stock of their hopeless situation. Eileen appeared to be close to a breakdown, getting thinner and thinner, suffering insomnia, diarrhoea, headaches, severe pain with menstruation, and fatigue from a strained back. Berryman himself was very badly and suffering from indigestion. The burning and itching of his scalp depressed him.

Biographers, no less than poets, are allowed to cut, revise and reconsider, but here it seems to be a case of Haffenden not changing his mind, but having it changed for him.

A further irony in this is that Eileen Simpson's own account of her eleven-year marriage, in *Poets in their Youth*, and more painful still, like many people, she is prepared to say herself what she cannot bear said by others. Her emphasis, though, is different and explains why she would object to the uncensored version above, not just as unduly personal and intrusive about herself, but as an undue piling on of the agony. Her Berryman is "the man with the irresistible grin", "wry", "implish", "amused", sociable and good-natured. Though frank about his suffering and self-destructive urges,

and about the difficulties of putting up with him, Mrs Simpson won't stand any dizzy nonsense about Berryman choosing to martyr himself for his art: "He might say in conversation that it was necessary for a poet to suffer, and even believe it, but no one was more eager to be relieved of suffering than John." Typical of her breezy good sense is the moment early in the marriage when she sees Berryman fall to the floor during a quarrel with his mother, refusing to accept that this is the poet's epilepsy doctors have diagnosed it as, she confronts him and expresses her doubts, with spectacular results: "John has no further attacks."

It is a loyal, affectionate, thoroughly endearing memoir, which valuably sets Berryman down among his friends and fellow-poets, and draws from a fund of memorable anecdotes. Randall Jarrell skidding at a party; the frosty Helen Blackmour, on hearing that her husband has invited "T. S. Eliot to dinner", snapping "Tell him to bring his own chop"; Robert Lowell analysing the works of his peers while laboriously washing dishes, "a poem a plate"; Theodore Roethke grabbing Edmund Wilson's jaw and asking "What's this, blubber?"; Pound in St Elizabeth's singing parodies of Yeats's epitaph: "Under bare Ben Bulbin's bum"; Berryman himself in the small hours treating uncomprehending Parisian bakers trapped at their ovens to a reading of his latest poem. Mrs Simpson even has a new theory for the husband's death: "Henry" — she and her husband had a dentist called Henry Glickman, whose gloomy patter over the sound of the drill ("What teeth like yours Mr Poet, you're going to need dough. Lots of it.") foreshadowed the hero's in the *Dream Songs*. By 1953, Eileen Simpson no longer felt able to cope with her husband's tightrope existence ("The job of netherhand had exhausted me") and they separated. But she dissents from the view that suicide was the inevitable price he paid for being the poet he was; on the contrary "It was the poetry that had kept him alive", and when it stopped coming despair overtook him. It is for such insights that this memoir will be valued, as well as for its sharp picture of a whole doomed generation of writers, the night of wine, dancing and brilliant talk giving way to paranoia, envy, madness and death.

Poets in their Youth is an elegantly written book, unlike John Haffenden's well-researched and in many ways admirable biography, which is all but ruined by the awkwardness, tedium and muddle of its prose. If there is a way to say something confusingly at length that could have been said clearly and succinctly, then Haffenden will find it. The wrong pompous note is struck in the very first sentence, when he speaks of his "engagement with" John Berryman, and thereafter the linguistic unhappinesses come thick and fast — from his "grave qualms" as a biographer "over the radical issue of war" to the wedding of Berryman's parents, who "were regularly married on 25 July 1912". No doubt Haffenden has had to spend many hours walled up with the John Berryman Papers in the University of Minnesota, but even so he cannot have failed to notice that it is not possible, in 1982, to describe a heterosexual braggart like Berryman as "compulsively gay". The failure of

language is especially noticeable when it comes to coping with the word "realligned", where feelings are "generated", and there are sentences like this: "Although he [Berryman] strove consciously to reach a state of contentment, his responsibility to himself-gratifying force which led him to exploit, as in sexual ventures, what was otherwise a psychological misfortune."

Haffenden's major contribution is in his energetic pursuit of those friends, teaching colleagues and students of Berryman. We have, for example, an eye-witness report of Berryman's first suicide attempt when, at sixteen, he lay down in front of an approaching train and was swept clear by schoolfriends. The passage is such testimony to the power of the Greek culture and society. Here, later in the day than one might have expected, is Vernant's first and shortest book, *Les origines de la pensée grecque*, 1962, well translated by an anonymous and Greekless hand ("en aut", p. 74; "hosios [secular]", p. 56). The book has long constituted one of the most stimulating and thoughtful accounts of the invention of philosophy by the Greeks. It is to be hoped that the elegance and power of its argument may now become more widely known among an English-speaking readership.

The [Mycaenean] King's disappearance prepared the way, through the long and murky period of isolation and reconstruction we call the Dark Age of Greece, for two interdependent innovations: the institution of the city-state and the birth of rational thought. What Vernant offers is a political and social explanation of the emergence

general function of the odes and some of their principal themes. His method is to summarize certain odes, and to discuss sections from others along with passages treating similar themes from other Greek literature, thus providing the reader with the background he cannot be counted on to know or to look up.

For example, *Olympian 1*, the ode to which Gargyth develops a whole book, is discussed briefly by Crotty in several different contexts. He uses the central myth of the poem to describe the relation between action and retribution, and later to illustrate how the gods' favour to man can be expressed in terms of erotic passion. In each case Crotty gives considerably more space to explanations of the general patterns of thought than to their particular expressions in *Olympian 1*. Action and retribution, like culture and nature, praise and blame, both complement and supersede one another, not only in Pindar's victory odes, but in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, and finally in ancient Greek religion, along with a general knowledge of the main facts of Greek history and geography. But interpreters of Pindar, too, especially in America, cannot assume that non-specialist readers will know anything about Pindar or his world, except that his poetry has been thought difficult, even when read in English translation, and that classical scholars at least consider his poetry important enough to try to make students read it, in spite of all the obstacles imposed by difference of language and culture.

Making Pindar accessible to modern audiences has become such a daunting task that the traditional forms of commentaries and translation appear to have been abandoned. Instead, new books assume that their readers will not have the time or ability to read articles in several European languages, or to pore over schoolroom maps of Greek colonies in Italy, or to track down in mythological handbooks the faded achievements of Pindar's ancestors — the Aegidae. Frank Nisetich's new translation (Baltimore, 1980) provides the historical background, glossaries, outlines of myths, details about the ancient games and even maps. For readers who know some Greek, Douglas Gerber's helpful new commentary on the first *Olympian Ode* (Toronto, 1982) requires the space of an entire book for a single Pindaric poem. In *Song and Action* Kevin Crotty tries to put Pindar's poetry in cultural perspective by describing the

plot of a particular myth or a long narrative poem like the *Iliad*, he could have expected even inexperienced readers to cope with his supplementary digressions and excursions. But

From polis to philosophy

Malcolm Schofield

JEAN-PIERRE VERNANT

The Origins of Greek Thought

144pp. Methuen. £9.95.

0 416 34310 4

The past few years have seen the publication of translations of a good number of the writings of Jean-Pierre Vernant and his Parisian associates Pierre Vidal-Nacquet and Marcel Détienne, mostly devoted to structuralist analysis of Greek myths designed to illuminate the religious and intellectual framework of ancient Greek culture and society. Here, later in the day than one might have expected, is Vernant's first and shortest book, *Les origines de la pensée grecque*, 1962, well translated by an anonymous and Greekless hand ("en aut", p. 74; "hosios [secular]", p. 56). The book has long constituted one of the most stimulating and thoughtful accounts of the invention of philosophy by the Greeks. It is to be hoped that the elegance and power of its argument may now become more widely known among an English-speaking readership.

The [Mycaenean] King's disappearance prepared the way, through the long and murky period of isolation and reconstruction we call the Dark Age of Greece, for two interdependent innovations: the institution of the city-state and the birth of rational thought. What Vernant offers is a political and social explanation of the emergence

From success to failure

Mary Lefkowitz

KEVIN CROTTY

Song and Action: The Victory Odes of Pindar

173pp. Johns Hopkins University

Press. £11.25.

0 818 2746 8

Even the ancient Greeks had difficulty with Pindar's poetry. Not long after his death, stories were told about his poems that explained obscure passages as allusions to quarrels with his patrons and his rivalries with other poets. Eventually scholars created *oides-memoire* to supply readers with information about the less familiar names and places and to offer interpretations, often fanciful, of the relevance and meaning of unfamiliar allusions and phrases. None the less, these ancient critics could assume that their readers knew everyday Greek and had some basic understanding of ancient Greek religion, along with a general knowledge of the main facts of Greek history and geography. But interpreters of Pindar, too, especially in America, cannot assume that non-specialist readers will know anything about Pindar or his world, except that his poetry has been thought difficult, even when read in English translation, and that classical scholars at least consider his poetry important enough to try to make students read it, in spite of all the obstacles imposed by difference of language and culture.

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plot of a particular myth or a long narrative poem like the *Iliad*, he could have expected even inexperienced readers to cope with his supplementary digressions and excursions. But

without much explicit discussion of methodological issues. Does Vernant mean to diagnose the cause, or the main cause, of the beginning of philosophy, or rather one of its necessary conditions, or simply a factor propitious to its occurring? English advocates of the theory like Lloyd and Edward Hussey (in *The Presocratics*, 1972) seem to settle for the third, and weakest, alternative, which is of course the least difficult in principle to defend. They make the development of the *polis* the most important in a whole complex of such factors. But Vernant conspicuously avoids this pluralistic approach. He appears to be committed to a strong causal thesis, and for much of the book gives the impression of believing that social explanation is both necessary and sufficient for understanding the phenomenon he is concerned with. Whatever the merits of this position, it has resulted here in an account of the origins of Greek thought which will be too neat and schematic for many tastes.

Does Vernant explain why philosophy should have begun in (of all Greek cities) Miletus a little after 600 BC and continued to flourish there and virtually there alone — so far as we can tell — for some decades? Not directly, although he says a little about the decisiveness of contacts with the East in the "unleashing" of Greek science on his career. Presumably he believes the question about Miletus is too particular to be of vital help in explaining the phenomenon he is concerned with. He certainly needs to begin tackling Vernant's larger question, then his general social explanation is no longer of the adequate form, since it points to the condition of the *polis* in general, not of one or more particular *poleis*. I do not see how — given the paucity of the evidence — Vernant can know enough to be confident that it was not some

very special concatenation of circumstances in Miletus (eg, its prosperity, its mercantile self-confidence, its proximity to the East, the flourishing literary and material culture of Ionia) which prepared the way for philosophy there, and whose absence in other cities, despite their thoroughly political institutions, made it less likely to originate elsewhere.

Vernant says a bit more, within his general diachronic account, about the significance of the introduction into Greece of an alphabetic script from the eighth century on, as a perfect instrument of the public, secular values of the *polis*. He discusses in this context the book of Anaximander, which was very likely the first prose book ever written by a Greek. That achievement illustrates the dangers of supposing that the origin of Greek philosophy can be more than very inadequately explained by any theory. However vigorous public debate in sixth-century Miletus may have been, and however well entrenched the use of writing for legal codes and official records, or for poetry, it needed an inspired individual to take the step (still obscure in its intentions) of writing a philosophical treatise in prose: thus inventing genre and medium and mode of transmission at a single blow, and simultaneously creating the possibility of a tradition of philosophizing. It is as startling a leap forward as that made by the monumental poet of the *Iliad* when he conceived the idea of a massive epic, built from traditional oral materials, which yet could never be sung in a single night or at a single festival. In speculating on the origins of Greek thought, then his general social explanation is no longer of the adequate form, since it points to the condition of the *polis* in general, not of one or more particular *poleis*. I do not see how — given the paucity of the evidence — Vernant can know enough to be confident that it was not some

Pindar's narratives are only occasionally straightforward, and a considerable proportion of any poem is concerned with the present achievements of patron and poet. Also, what makes the poems exciting is not so much what Pindar says, which can sound conventional or even banal in summary, as how he says it. Crotty's discussions of several complete odes and his treatment of longer passages, although clear and sensible, never invite the reader to engage himself with the vivid details that make Pindar's poetry so memorable; where Pindar speaks — ironically to us — of Calm (*Hesychia*): "harsh, you attack your enemies' power and put their insolence in the bilge" (*Pythian* 8.10-12), Crotty summarizes not inaccurately, but blandly, that "as daughter of Justice, *Hesychia*'s actions are of a retributive kind: she rewards gentleness and punishes the insolent".

Crotty should be commended for having tried to go beyond the narrow concerns of much recent scholarship, and for concentrating on the larger ethical issues raised by the odes; he justly reminds us that Pindar's audiences learned from his poetry how to confront extraordinary success and the ultimate failure of human enterprise. But as it stands *Song and Action* is more about Pindar's world than Pindar's poetry, and Crotty's readers — if they read only his book — will never know why the ancients considered Pindar the greatest of the poets of the *polis*.

Just published in the Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics series, of which the General Editors are E. J. Kenney and Mrs P. E. Easterling, are new editions of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and the *Trachiniae* (thus bringing up to four the number of Sophocles' tragedies that are available in the series). The *Oedipus Rex* — the "masterpiece that in the eyes of posterity has overshadowed every other achievement in the field of ancient drama" — has been edited by R. D. Dawe (260pp. Cambridge University Press, £19.50 and paperback £7.50, 0 521 24543 5 and 0 521 28777 4) and P. E. Easterling has herself edited the *Trachiniae* (254pp. Cambridge University Press, £19.50 and paperback £7.50, 0 521 20087 3 and 0 521 28776 6). Each has a text with critical apparatus, a commentary dealing principally with the play as literature, an introduction designed for readers even without a knowledge of Greek, an appendix on lyric metres and a section on the transmission of the text.

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PHYLLIS LEWSEN

John X. Merriman: Paradoxical South African Statesman
431pp. Yale University Press. £28.
0 300 02521 1

J. B. Curry, until the outbreak of the Boer War one of John X. Merriman's closest friends, wrote to him in 1896: "Your qualifications are undoubted, but there is something lacking. . . . You must be more considerate of the feelings or even the folly of others. You must be less impetuous in your decisions, less hasty in forming and expressing your opinions. . . . In short your tongue is your worst enemy and you must learn to curb it." It was a harsh judgment, but an accurate one. Merriman, South African statesman, probably Cape Colony's most able Minister of Finance, and its last Prime Minister, bore his friend no rancour, but he did not mend his ways. More than a dozen years later Lord Crewe, Secretary of State for the Colonies at the time of South African unification, who admitted to liking Merriman, thought him "prickly and impulsive and described him at the age of nearly seventy as an *enfant terrible*. Curry's criticism explains why there were so many who admired Merriman's talents but shied away from his incisive. Merriman's response to it accounts for the numbers of those who loved him for his loyalty, his steadfastness and his integrity.

Phyllis Lewsen has spent many years in the scholarly study of Merriman's political career. Her biography of him bears witness to her deep understanding of the man and of the important period of South African history in which he played such a significant role. As in her four-volume edition of Merriman's papers she has omitted any detailed reference to his family life. This may have resulted in an undue emphasis upon the more aggressive side of his character. But politics were his life, and life is what concerns the biographer. The author rarely expresses her opinion of her subject directly. The evidence — in the shape of Merriman's speeches and correspondence, the comments of his contemporaries and the columns of the ever watchful and rarely impartial press — is marshalled with scrupulous fairness and speaks for itself.

Merriman's public career, which began in 1869, spanned more than half a century. It covered an era in which South Africa was involved in a number of wars, internal and imperial, white against black, Briton against Boer. In the course of them it was converted from an amorphous agglomeration of dependent colonies and minor states, Bantus and Boers into a large, superficially united but still fundamentally divided dominion. Merriman himself changed in that time, from a young Englishman — in his utter distrust of the colonies and of all colonial institutions — into a South African statesman, jealous of his country's autonomy. The process of his conversion was expedited in the later 1870s by what he saw as the bungling attempt of the Earl of Carnarvon, as Secretary of State for the Colonies, to impose federation upon South Africa against the wishes of the South Africans themselves. It was carried further by the arrogant imperialism of the High Commissioner, Sir Bartle Frere, who, with the same end in view, sacked the Cape Colony ministry, including Merriman, and waged aggressive war on the Transkei and Zululand. Merriman's distrust of imperialism became linked with a distrust of capitalism after the Jameson Raid. His suspicions were confirmed by Sir Alfred Milner's unremitting pressure on the South African Republic, which culminated in the second Anglo-Boer War, and by his dependence upon the gold-mining industry to provide the foundation for his policy of reconstruction after the war. Though these events explain Merriman's hostility to Whitehall and to the mining magnates his obsession with those bogies clouded his judgment. One cannot escape the suspicion that his distrust of Milner was

accentuated by the fact that both men were sincerely convinced of their own rectitude but unfortunately disagreed fundamentally over their objectives.

One of Merriman's most notable qualities was his almost prophetic vision of the impact of events upon the future. He was probably the first to recognize that the discovery of gold in the eastern Transvaal — before the discoveries on the Rand — would result in the transfer of South Africa's centre of gravity from Cape Town to Pretoria. In 1900, after the annexation of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State, he informed the Cape Parliament with uncanny prescience: "Anxiously these people today, and as sure as you do England will lose South Africa — and something much worse is going to happen — South Africa is going to lose England and all that England means to it." It was Merriman, too, who opposed the introduction of Chinese labourers to revive the mining industry — not primarily on racial grounds as Smuts did, but because he rightly foresaw that

to do so, even on a temporary basis, would permanently harm the position of the black workers.

It is over Merriman's attitude towards the black population that Lewsen's biography throws so much more light than did the edition of his letters. Considerable space is devoted to his campaign on behalf of black people's rights, a campaign which met with some significant triumphs but which ultimately failed to achieve its main objectives. Merriman dismissed the idea that all men are equal, but for him inequality was not a matter of race but of ability. He frankly acknowledged that, in his view, to give the franchise to adequately qualified Blacks was the surest way to protect the dominant position of White civilization in South Africa. But expediency was not the only or even the main consideration, though he might use the argument to try to convert Smuts for Merriman, justice and compassion were the ruling factors. His failure to convince the Boers, even on grounds of expediency,

in the years leading up to Union was surprising. What was not equally foreseeable was his success in carrying Cape opinion with him in his campaign to ensure that the colony's colour-blind franchise would survive the Act of Union. For, like Milner, Merriman was fully aware that the British colonists conceded nothing to the Boers in their distrust of the Blacks.

On the question of raising the qualifications for the Cape franchise in 1892 it is interesting that, contrary to Lewsen's account, Jan Hofmeyr, the leader of the Cape Dutch, denied some years later that he had suggested any increase in the qualifications. Instead he attributed the suggestion to James Rose Innes who, according to the evidence produced by Lewsen, was strongly opposed to any change.

Lewsen has provided a brilliant evocation of white politics in South Africa. Where her touch is slightly less sure is in her handling of Britain's policies towards South Africa, particularly in the earlier part of her book. She does not seem wholly to recognize that British ministers were not as accurately informed about events and attitudes in South Africa as she herself is or, indeed, as were some of the South African political leaders of the day. Even the latter were not always clear, and did not always wish to be clear, about the views of their opponents or of the British government. The Earl of Carnarvon, for example, was not a vengeful man, even when his plans for federation foundered — as he believed — on the shoals of South African selfishness and stupidity. Nor can one doubt his sincerity in thinking that if the confidence of the Whites in South Africa was to be restored and the security of the colonies guaranteed, something more positive was needed than the continuing presence of imperial troops. A federation imposed by Whitehall may not have been the answer, but after the panic reaction of the Natal colonists to Chief Langalabale's minor resistance, and in view of the reported fears of the Transvaal settlers concerning the threats of Chief Sekukuni, the colonial secretary's anxiety was not without justification.

On Milner's objectives in South Africa before the outbreak of war Lewsen is clear and uncompromisingly succinct: "It was British power and rule, not the acquisition of Uitlander citizenship, for which Milner

was battling." She quotes Milner himself: "War is a risk run once and all, and if we succeed we shall be free of this nightmare for ever." This is a contrast, after crediting Merriman with an awareness of individual merit and historical complexities, which prevented him from becoming a doctrinaire Hobsonian over the years of the Boer War, she herself presents an uncharacteristically doctrinaire assessment of the role of capitalism in bringing about the war.

Merriman was not to become Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, greatly though he coveted that honour. However sound his judgments might be over many issues, he could never convince enough people that he was right. Like Milner he stood on the watch-tower and saw the wider scene. Unfortunately, and again as in the case of Milner, those who did not stand on the watch-tower could not appreciate the wider vision provided from the vantage-point. In one vital respect too, Merriman's judgment was seriously at fault. Lewsen sums up his mistake in the words, "He relied on the South African identity that was developed." It is an appropriate epithet for Merriman and for South Africa. Self-interest, racial prejudice even sincerely held ideals — were from which could unite as effectively as they could divide. Merriman had proclaimed his political creed in 1894 when he wrote to Smuts: "Surely the men 'politics' are not the means, they are themselves the highest end; as politics which centre themselves on the dreary wrangles of the ins and outs of small city great, and at raising the whole life and character of every one in the community." Unfortunately the ins and the outs preferred the wrangles and did not find them dreary. Even the discussions and debates leading up to Union, in which Merriman played such a heroic part, were proof of that.

Dr Lewsen's biography brings to the full flavour of the subject, his brilliance, his arrogance, his impulsiveness, his foresight, his generosity, his obstinacy, his insightfulness, his prejudices and his remarkable grasp of economic issues, and it places him in a clearly defined historical context. In her preface the author writes that the present book is a shortened version of a fuller work. One wonders, with some admiration, what could possibly have been added which would not detract from so well rounded an account.

of concessions, and so "significantly hastened" the emergence of popular African nationalism.

By his forcefully argued interpretation of the Colonial Office's contribution to the study of the role of empire. But studies centred on the activities of a single Department have limitations as well as merits. In this book, yet the over-reliance to Accra was certainly also influenced by conclusions drawn from Czechoslovakia and Malaya, and the subsequent drive for disengagement was fear of allowing Communist influence to take hold. (The French, locked in conflict with the RDA in the West Coast, were highly dubious as to whether this was the correct method.)

Again, there is little consideration of what concrete British interests were considered to be at stake in African colonies. A very interesting investigation of private papers (including Attlee and Dalton) shows that Labour Ministers show that they were indifferent or hostile to the colonies while others (like Bevin and Churchill) regarded "partnership" as a method of reinforcing Britain's own economic recovery. Yet Dr. Pearce, in his discussions within the Colonial Office, fails to emphasize the significant shift in development policy which this latter group brought about in response to the dollar crisis of 1947. British relations with her African colonies followed a course too complex to be marked only by the landmarks of departmental

He forages, she breeds

Vernon Reynolds

HELEN E. FISHER

The Sex Contract: The Evolution of Human Behaviour
176pp. Granada. £7.95.
0 246 1768 0

In this little book, Helen Fisher neatly sums up much currently received opinion on the origins of human sexuality and the family. Her sources are (a) current studies of female sexuality, (b) current speculative theories of the evolution of human behaviour, (c) studies of other primates, (d) the fossil record. Her book is a bit like a popularized version of Nancy Tanner's *On Becoming Human* reviewed in the TLS on April 9, 1982, containing essentially the same ideas, and the same feminist bias.

Dr Fisher is, however, more emphatic than Dr Tanner about man's rampant sexuality. Her first chapter is entitled "Sex Athletes" and is about women: "The human female is capable of constant sexual arousal. She is physically able to make love every day of her adult life. . . . She can make love whenever she pleases." And while the male orgasm is dismissed in a paragraph, the female equivalent gets several pages. Thus it is that Dr Fisher sets out her question: why are women so sexually able?

The loss of oestrus in our species certainly calls for explanation. At first sight (literally) the disappearance of outward signs of sexual receptiveness might be thought to be a disadvantage in the mating game. How then could it have evolved? The explanation currently favoured by Dr Fisher (though not without its critics) has to do with a change of mating strategy that can only be understood if we accept certain other hypotheses about early hominid evolution.

The scenario is based on our ancestors on the plains of Africa developing the earliest known hominid

specialization: bipedalism. We know from fossils such as "Lucy" that upright gait was the first evolutionary step towards man. Rightly, therefore, anthropologists have asked why this odd way of moving should have arisen, what its advantages would have been. Lovejoy, Tanner and others have suggested that the biggest single advantage was the liberation of the upper limbs for carrying. Our nearest relatives, the quadrupedal apes, do not carry anything very much in their hands. Occasionally chimpanzees will carry sticks for termite fishing, or stones for opening hard nuts, or fruit for eating in a safe place nearby. But they are not designed for travelling long distances carrying food or other objects. They cannot straighten their knees and so cannot walk in the characteristic striding gait of man, nor run bipedally with anything like human competence.

The ability to carry efficiently might seem a far cry from female sexual athleticism, but the argument manages to bridge this gap. The object of carrying was to amass food, thus avoiding the need of our relatives the apes to spend the bulk of their waking lives foraging. Modern gathering peoples such as the Bushmen can in a few hours collect enough food for two or three days. But this new habit is only successful if combined with a recognized home-base in which the food can be safely stored, and a social organization based on sharing and co-operation. Again, explanation is called for, since it is the *sine qua non* of the Darwinian process that between individuals competition rules rather than a tendency to share.

As sociobiology has shown, however, a tendency to share can evolve between kin. The reason is that any genes for sharing will be passed on if sharing increases the survival chances of close relatives. This would mean, for instance, that a female would be expected to share with her sister and brother any food left over after feeding her offspring, and could expect food in return. Males who bring in surplus food, likewise, should share with their siblings. But they cannot

divert food to their genetic offspring since they do not know who these are.

In this context, assuming that the females who can gain access to the most reliable food supply will leave the most offspring, we can expect new strategies to arise. The suggestion is that those females who made themselves most sexually attractive to males would out-breed those who were less successful, and so gradually any genes promoting female sexuality and the lengthening of the period of receptivity would spread through the species. But this would only happen if their offspring survived, and this depended on their obtaining food from the males. Females therefore developed a "sex contract" with males, giving sex and receiving food. Once they had formed a lasting relationship with a male, they could devote more time to their offspring's welfare and, by travelling less, do better themselves. Any heritable characteristics underlying provisioning behaviour in males would now be transmitted and spread because males would be enhancing the survival prospects of their own children and their own genes.

Not only was female receptivity extended right through the menstrual cycle, it was also extended into the period of pregnancy, and after birth it resumed quickly, even if lactation was in progress. A female could not afford to lose her mate. The pair bond was on. In line with Desmond Morris and others, Dr Fisher believes that breasts were evolved to maintain male interest, and to increase female sexuality.

The male, in this scheme, gets a scant look-in. He is the object of sexual selection. His large penis size is woman's doing. So are his beard, his larger body size, and his masculinity. True, he is credited with a penchant for smaller, less aggressive females, but that is all. And what does he get out of the contract? A few vegetables, to reward him after a hard day chasing game on the savanna. One can imagine the incipient verbal exchange: "Grunt-grunt" (It's a jungle out there!) "Ugh-ugh" (Stop griping and eat your nuts).

actually generate the knowledge of good and evil. Drawing from anthropological writings in a way which some professionals may find cavalier he posits a fundamental opposition between "naked" and "concealed" societies, with the latter in a state of permanent and institutionalized exile from their own sexuality. The old Polynesians, "unconcealed" if not strictly speaking naked, represent for him the last true Garden of Eden on earth, their ordered social relations, geared towards the maximization of sensual pleasure, being the wholesome antithesis to genitally repressed modernity.

Anatomy of Nakedness is a light-hearted polemic rather than an objective treatise, and those who view it in the latter light may find much to criticize. Ableman's survey of the development of clothing is, in high sketchy and unclear. The parallel he draws between primitive man's body decoration and industrial man's more sophisticated plays tend to weaken his assertions about relative psychological health. Occasionally he seizes on examples which are manifestly unsuited to support his thesis. Swift is made the mouthpiece for his ordered century's fear of the naked body: "highly civilized" Swift may have been, but he was also highly neurotic.

Sometimes, as he contemplates the modern world, Ableman slides into slick McLuhanisms: "factories are metaphors for the body itself, devouring the earth and excreting consumer products." "phallus substitutes the great erect rockets with their inbuilt, cosmic orgasms." Sometimes, however, he takes as his text a truism which can well bear the weight of a sermon. The damnable sexual energy which built those rockets might yet help to save us, he suggests, if we were turned into less perverted directions. We now (for example in watching television) cheerfully tolerate

our ferocity: what we cannot tolerate is our sexuality.

Psychoanalytic man terms voyeurism and exhibitionism "perversions." Nonsense, says Ableman: they are simply assertions of instinctual imperatives, manifesting themselves in ways which a perverted society has outlawed. His historical survey of Western man's uneasy relationship with his body is eloquent and provocative, noting desperate gestures like the emergence of defiantly naked Christian sects (Paul of Tarsus has a lot to answer for) and perennial tendencies such as the way public baths have so often turned into brothels, or the way revolutionary régimes regulate styles of dress as a first priority.

Two statements by Lord Clark, one to the Longford Committee and the other at the beginning of *The Nude*, are analysed with devastating clarity in the course of a chapter on art. Ableman shows the absurdity of the Western assumption that there is a distinction to be made between art and pornography, and he argues that the poster, denatured nude of Western tradition represents a communal failure to regain contact with the body which that tradition's religious and political censors have banished. Naked peoples, he observes, tend not to produce naturalistic images of the human body, no matter how representative their images of flora and fauna: not having our obsession with its surface, they are free to explore its magic and mythic possibilities.

Ableman ends with a candid account of the week he spent at a naturist centre in France. Analysis of his own and his wife's responses leads him to conclude that that way of life is only a safety valve, and that it heralds no real change in consciousness. There is no going back, he says, we cannot become animals again; is to evolve towards that positive view of nudity which prevailed for a time in ancient Greece.

The big cover-up

Michael Church

PAUL ABLEMAN

Anatomy of Nakedness
112pp. Orbis. £7.95.
0 85613 175 8

Nestling in the jewelled prose of Salvador Dalí's grandly decadent novel *Hidden Faces* there is a recipe for the forcible inducement of lust. The aphrodisiac ritual is long and complex, but its mainspring is a kind of exhibitionism in reverse. Desire is made to mount as the initially naked bodies are progressively clothed until, still forbidden to touch or speak, and bound to the fragrant branches of myrtle trees, the condemned couple, sumptuously clad, reach simultaneous orgasm.

Though it does not figure in Paul Ableman's whirlwind cultural tour this image could serve as a perfect illustration of his thesis, which is that clothes are part cause and part symptom of "civilized" man's sad sexuality. Ableman's favourite image is that of the Garden of Eden, in which Adam and Eve led an animal, amoral existence until their discovery, as they bit into the apple, that they were naked. As Ableman points out, their clear implication in Genesis is that their new-found knowledge of good and evil directed their attention not to the nakedness of their bodies but to the nakedness of their genitals. Thus they made themselves not cloaks but aprons, which would begeth forth those shameful, dangerous parts, while the serpent was ordered to go on his belly in the dust. The story is indeed a striking social metaphor.

Ableman observes that naked people feel shame when they are first dressed, as though those aprons

THE VETERAN.



A cartoon from the Rand Daily Mail, March 12, 1915 (reproduced in the book reviewed here) showing John X. Merriman in the South African Parliament scolding his political opponents. Outside Parliament he treated them less savagely. He and Sir Thomas Smuts, for example, could be found dining amiably together or sharing a cab to the station after having a terrible row in the House.

The drive to disengage

J. D. Hargreaves

R. D. PEARCE

The Turning Point in Africa: British Colonial Policy 1938-48
223pp. Cass. £15.
0 7146 3160 4

R. D. Pearce's title is a little misleading: for him, the turning-point of 1938-48 took place within the walls of the Colonial Office, and he has relatively little to say about developments in Africa itself. Originally a densely documented official and Ministers reacted during these years to changing perceptions and predictions concerning their distant colonial empire. The main lines of this story have been becoming progressively clearer since researchers gained access to the archives, but Pearce has much of interest to add.

During the 1930s the Depression compelled politicians to reconsider the economic and social responsibilities of government in Africa as well as in Europe. Radical critics claimed that colonies were poor because they were politically dependent; Lord Hailey replied that they were dependent because of their original poverty. Well before 1938 the Colonial Office, by appointing specialist Advisers and Advisory Committees, was creating a capacity to tackle some causes of poverty, and in 1940 the first Colonial Development and Welfare Act provided a financial framework for

improvement. Although little more than £1,000,000 was spent under its provisions, Pearce rightly calls it a "landmark"; but it was a landmark in the reconstruction of the Empire rather than its liquidation. American wartime anti-imperial pressures, which W. R. Louis has documented, could now be resisted with the argument that a great programme of reforms should be allowed to take its course.

Yet the long-term process of economic development, and still more the short-term pressures of war, were certain to increase demands for political change. When Hailey, with his long Indian experience, revealed British Africa in 1940 to report on *Native Administration and Political Development*, his "outstanding impression" was "one of rapid change, of greater changes impending." Hailey decisively rejected the extreme conservative doctrines of indirect rule, still applied by Sir Theodore A. Smith in Northern Nigeria, shifting the criterion of good government "from the principle of tradition to the pragmatic of acceptability." Hailey remained judiciously sceptical of this new local government reform as a means of delaying, rather than expediting, political transfer to the centre. But by now the Colonial Office was intent on "keeping the Initiative" by reacting positively to every strong manifestation of African pressure; the violent incidents which began in Accra on February 28, 1948, and led to the deaths of twenty-nine Africans, provided the stimulus for a new leap forward of disproportionate size. Pearce argues that the Colonial Office, psychologically programmed by its own planning, over-reacted in its offer

was to brief him that the Office produced a "Tentative Plan" for constitutional reform which Dr Pearce rightly sees as a significant shift in policy.

Other shifts and adjustments, both principled and pragmatic, were quickly generated by the officials' new zeal for planning, and Pearce does not attempt to describe them all. Like his mentor Ronald Robinson he sees the next great landmark, not in the Labour victory of 1945, but in the "Local Government" despatch of February 25, 1947, and the set of policy papers prepared next May for the forthcoming African Conference. Cohen was their chief architect and Arthur Creech Jones, former critic co-opted into the circle of progressive planners, simply the public spokesman. Policy had now swung decisively in favour of incorporating chiefs and authorities for "nation-building." Many Governors remained sceptical of this new local government reform as a means of delaying, rather than expediting, political transfer to the centre. But by now the Colonial Office was intent on "keeping the Initiative" by reacting positively to every strong manifestation of African pressure; the violent incidents which began in Accra on February 28, 1948, and led to the deaths of twenty-nine Africans, provided the stimulus for a new leap forward of disproportionate size. Pearce argues that the Colonial Office, psychologically programmed by its own planning, over-reacted in its offer

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The peeler's lot

John Keegan

PATRICK SHEA

Voices and the Sound of Drums: An Irish Autobiography
308pp. Belfast: Blackstaff. £6.95.
0 85640 228 1

The British know few facts about Ireland, but among them are these: one, that the Catholics are the indigenous inhabitants of the country, the Protestants the descendants of immigrants settled by the English, and that the English ruled Ireland before 1921 through a wholly Protestant administration; three, that the province of Northern Ireland, created in 1921, contains a Catholic minority which is there entirely against its will. As bold statements, all those facts are wrong.

I am Irish enough to have learnt from my own family folklore that statements about absolute religious divisions should be treated with suspicion. Catholic on both sides, I can be fairly sure that the Keegans were so since the mission of St Patrick. But my mother's family was called Bridgman, and her grandmother Hewson, and in Limerick, whence the family hailed, the Hewsons are Protestant ascendancy. Moreover, the Bridgmans owned land on a scale uncommon among Catholics. Yet there was no family memory of a Protestant past, except for a rumour that the nucleus of the Bridgman property had been granted to a captain of that name by William III after the siege of Limerick in the 1690s. "Would they be terrible tall people?" a Limerick bus conductor replied to my enquiries about where to alight nearest to my great-aunts and uncles (they were, of course, all unmarried) on my only visit to them. And so they turned out to be. Height is notoriously an indicator of religion in Ireland: small Protestant genes. It was all very puzzling. My mother suspected bastardy a long time back. I thought the Bridgmans might have

been settled a bit thin among abundant Catholic neighbours. Their place was of the Protestant beaten track. But we didn't know and, as most Irish family records were burnt in Dublin during the Civil War, we probably never shall.

Whatever the facts turned out to be, they would raise few eyebrows in Ireland. The Irish swim in a sea of ambiguities of which the mixed Protestant-Catholic family is but one. Others concern the role of Catholics in the British government of Ireland before Partition in 1921, others again Catholic attitudes to Partition itself. Older Catholics remember, though they do not tell, that the old Irish police force, north and south, was almost entirely Catholic, that it retained the support of many Catholics up to and beyond Partition and that the dubiety of the nationalist government's ability to maintain law and order after Partition caused many Catholics in the North to be grateful that they had landed up the wrong side of the border. This, on the whole, is information that they keep to themselves. But here is an Irish autobiography of which these memories are the subject-matter, and so an absorbing record of an Anglo-Irish relationship which neither country can bury. It is also a moving and beautifully written book.

Patrick Shea was born, the son of a "peeler", in County Westmeath in 1908. "Peelers" - the common speech of Ireland is a museum of English slang - were members of the Royal Irish Constabulary, the common police force of the whole island and the oldest in the United Kingdom. It was a semi-military force, trained to bear arms and sharply divided into officers and men. The officers were drawn from the Protestant ascendancy. But the men were almost entirely Catholic, even though enlistment meant accepting a sort of internal exile. Exile was partly imposed by police policy, which forbade men to serve in their home districts and housed them in small barracks apart from the population, but partly derived from the fact that

they took orders from the ascendancy. As Catholic intolerance for home rule grew at the turn of the last century, the peelers and their families were increasingly set apart, a tendency said to account for the better school records of their children, who lacked for playmates. Mr Shea's life certainly bore out this belief, for he was to have a brilliant career built upon outstanding educational success.

Yet a peeler might be as nationalist as the next man, at least in the days before nationalism had come to mean demand for total independence. Shea's father certainly was strong for home rule, so much so that the "voices and the sound of drums" which are the author's earliest memory came from crowds celebrating the passing of the 1914 Home Rule Bill at a bonfire meeting in the centre of Athlone to which his father had taken him.

As we watched, exhilarated and a little frightened, the discordant noises of the crowd began to respond to the rhythm of the band buried somewhere amongst them and suddenly everyone was singing, singing with fervour and passion and joy. "A nation once again / A nation once again / And Ireland, once a province, be a nation once again".

The demise of the Home Rule Act raises one of Churchill's "terrible ifs" of history. If enacted at once, it might have reconciled the Catholic majority to the Union for good. But Protestant, particularly Ulster Protestant, hostility to it prompted Westminster to hesitate; and the outbreak of the First World War then provided Asquith with a convenient pretext to shelve the measure until the war was over. "England's difficulty being Ireland's opportunity", in the traditional philosophy of militant nationalism, Asquith was not allowed his breathing-space. The Easter Rising, or more particularly the summary execution of its leaders, made Sinn Féin ("Ourselves Alone") a popular cause, and carried that party to victory in the elections of 1918. Shortly afterwards

the shooting started and Shea recalls the heavy heart with which he watched his father bucking on a revolver, for the first time in his service, before proceeding from barracks on evening patrol.

Soon the barracks were to be fortified all over Ireland, and their little garrisons imprisoned within them. The Irish Republican Army, as the military wing of Sinn Féin now came to be called, had singled out the intimidation of the RIC as the most profitable aim to pursue in its guerrilla campaign - the concept of demoralizing the police has now entered into guerrilla lore the world over - and bit by bit it succeeded in driving the constabulary out of the remotest districts and began to drive individuals out of the force. Shea's heart-scorned resignation. Despite the heart-rending anxieties of his family, from which he was separated for long periods on detached duty in dangerous stations, he soldiered out the campaign to the end.

In the South the victorious nationalists then replaced the constabulary with their own *Garda* - one of the scraps of revived Gaelic which was to catch on - and the old peelers took their leave. Some went to Britain's new Mandated territory in Palestine, where ironically they were almost at once to be confronted by another movement seeking to recreate a language and become a state of its own, "a nation once again". Others emigrated to England. But the majority went back to their family farms in the South and West, or commuted their pensions to buy smallholdings. Their number contained, in Shea's memory, "more good men than my children or my children's children will meet in any company, anywhere" and they "were not made to feel unwelcome in the Irish Free State".

The author feels that his father "could have gone to live anywhere in the country without fear of molestation". The chance of employment, and perhaps disenchant-

ment with nationalism, took him to the North. It was an odd choice for a Catholic, for the heightened sectarianism of post-war Ireland threatened his children's future, if not his own. And Shea quickly came to doubt if he would ever get on. The headmaster of his Christian Brothers school - it had of course to be Christian Brothers, a body as formative in its influence on modern Ireland as Sinn Féin - so keenly anticipated official discrimination against his boys that he actually declined to enter them for the civil service examinations. The author nevertheless insisted on doing so, and to the surprise and delight of no one more than his headmaster, was appointed a clerical officer in the Ulster Ministry of Labour in 1926.

The second half of Shea's book concerns his life within the service, which he remained until retirement. In a way the story has a greater intrinsic interest than the first, for it contains much reflection on the nature of Northern Irish society, in which his own career was to contradict almost all assumptions made about it. Though remaining a Catholic, and making no attempt to disguise his practice of the faith, he rose steadily through every level of the civil service, passing eventually into the mandarin administrative class and retiring as permanent secretary of the Ulster Ministry of Education.

But, interesting particularly and generally though his public life was, it is his childhood and the Troubles which remain with the reader. Patrick Shea has an Irish pen. It sketches a vanished world of tiny and remote towns with a pointillist sharpness, rounds in the openness and cheer of Irish houses, their own fireplaces, etches the society and passion of peasant politics, shows all neatly skewered, one after another, the host of contradictions which compose Irish life. Ireland is a very strange country and it is the higher compliment one can pay the author's say that English people, after reading his book, will be more muddled about it than ever.

Corruption personified

Patrick Collinson

ROGER LOCKYER

Buckingham: The Life and Political Career of George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham 1592-1628
506pp. Longman. £14.95.
0 582 30296 9

The late Joel Hurstfield once wrote an essay called "Political Corruption in Modern England: the Historian's Problem". The title was meant to suggest that members of the historical profession are more than ordinarily prone to worldly temptation but that the definition and evaluation of corrupt political practices poses problems for the historian of peculiar complexity. Moral judgment, a faculty which Hurstfield was particularly keen to discard, must be mitigated by the historian's principal asset: empathy with the conditions and values prevailing in alien societies. For a modern public servant (in Whitehall if not in Lagos) to accept gifts and favours on a scale so lavish as to outweigh more legitimate incomes is corruption. Not necessarily so in seventeenth-century England. However, the seventeenth century considered it wrong for a judge to accept a bribe and in 1621 the Lord Chancellor, Francis Bacon, was removed from office for this offence. But Bacon's corruption was not out of the ordinary and nor did he feel simply because he was corrupt. In such cases, charges of "corruption" were political devices and weapons.

In an exchange between Professor Hurstfield and Menna Prestwich, the biographer of the Jacobean financier and politician Lionel Cranfield, the question at issue was whether the problem could be eased by distinguishing between corrupt and relatively incorrupt individuals. Was there more to be said in favour of Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, than of Lionel Cranfield, Earl of Middlesex, whose career, like Bacon's, ended in imprisonment? Bacon and Cranfield held the same offices of state. If it is political corruption to subvert the public interest to private ends, then it is not apparent that either man was

corrupt. Hatfield House continues to proclaim that Cecil enriched himself and his descendants beyond measure and we wonder how he and his father, Lord Burghley, managed it. But Hurstfield's judgment was that Cecil's passion for personal advancement, although sometimes pursued by dubious means, was more than balanced by his passion for the king's service, and it was to this latter passion that he succumbed when he staked his reputation on the financial reforms negotiated with Parliament in 1610 and lost.

And what of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, the real cause of Cranfield's difficulties, to whose "eminent merit" the fallen Bacon dedicated his *Essays*, which included an essay "Of Deformity" where we find reflections on the theme of corruption in the thinly disguised form of Cecil? Hurstfield believed that with Cecil's death corruption of the political system and of the monarchy itself became endemic. In the perspective of traditional historiography, Buckingham stands as the personification of that degeneration, the corruption of the age consisting not so much in his conduct as in his very existence. How can the historian defend the appointment as Lord Admiral of a stripling of twenty-seven who knew nothing of naval affairs and whose meteoric rise owed less to his unproven administrative and political talents than to a pretty face and the capacity to afford James I certain private consolations? Why should a mere favourite, still only thirty and with little claim on the nation's gratitude, have been enabled, at royal and public expense, to lay out at least £50,000 (millions in modern money) on the purchase and furnishing of two great London houses, a mansion in the country and other property, all in a single year? How could it make sense for Buckingham, without previous diplomatic experience, to negotiate the Spanish match and all that depended upon it, in the minefield of Madrid? How could the delicate equivoque of factions on which political stability depended survive the near monopoly of patronage which was exercised by this one man? For the most part, the historical verdict has endorsed the

remonstrance of the House of Commons of June 17, 1628, which attributed all the evils of the time to "the excessive power of the duke of Buckingham and the abuse of that power".

Juste comprendre rend très indulgent. The career of Buckingham has never before been explored with the thoroughness of Roger Lockyer's scholarly and often arresting biography and consequently it is now better understood, and in a sense condoned. For unless the biographer begins with an overtly antagonistic purpose, his identification with his subject is almost bound to lead in a sympathetic direction and in the case of a vilified figure like Buckingham, into an exercise in rehabilitation. Consequently, Mr Lockyer's impressive study rises as a contribution to the current work of revision which is ridding early Stuart history of its heroes and villains, playing down the sense of inexorably advancing constitutional crisis, and explaining the political conflicts of the age in terms of honest misunderstandings occurring within a malfunctioning political system.

In summary, Lockyer's case for the defence of Buckingham can be summarized as follows. The hostility which the favourite aroused owed little to his character, which was open and courteous. The Duke was generous and loyal to the very extremities of his own kindred. But he was also careful to reconcile his enemies, notably the Howards and later the Earl of Pembroke, against whom he was admittedly more prudent than cavalier. There is no evidence that Buckingham sought to annihilate his rivals or to supplant all other factions and connections. But in so far as his power was disproportionate (and in financial terms his fortune was no greater than Cecil's before him or Strafford's later) two explanations are to be preferred to the crude charge of megalomania. In all large European states, this was an age of prime ministers, and Buckingham was the English counterpart of Olivares and Richelieu, or at least aspired to that station. Moreover the Duke's unique status was that of an adopted member of the royal family who in his letters addressed James I as "Dear Dad". The little ones of the Villiers tribe were said to dance up and down the king's private stairs "like fairies" and were regarded as the royal grandchildren.

So Buckingham did not so much cancel out ordinary political rivalries as distance them from the Crown by one remove. Factions still existed, but often for the purpose of competing for the favourite's favour. Sir John Elliot's parliamentary attacks were at least partly motivated by jealousy of Sir John Coke, whom Buckingham, entrusted with day-to-day management of the king's administration, made except by assertion. How many hours a month were spent on paper work? We are not told. And if the Lord Admiral did "wonders" for the Navy upon his appointment in 1619, why upon his ships so unfit for service five

years later? Lockyer's explanation that Buckingham had built a good peace-time navy seems irrelevant to the epoch of the Thirty Years' War. To be sure, England's military capability was hamstrung at every point by chronic cash-flow problems, and without doubt the immediate blame for this financial tourney lay with the bloody-minded parliamentary classes who demanded war in support of the international Protestant cause while having no conception of its cost, still less the inclination to meet it.

Ultimately, under pressure from the more persistent and expensive hostilities of the late seventeenth century, success would be found through a greater measure of public accountability and responsibility. Until that reform was brought about, "corruption" was the word which the tax-paying classes and their parliamentary representatives were obliged to use to express their dissatisfaction with the misapplication of public money by those entrusted with its expenditure. And on the evidence of this book, Buckingham was incapable of transcending such "corruption". Nor, to be fair, should we expect such transcendent virtue of him.

If this admirable book is not quite a masterpiece it is because Lockyer's sympathy for his subject leads him to dodge the complexities and even contradictions of character in a man who cut the pearl buttons off his suits in order to finance naval expenditure from his own pocket; and who then spent £10,000, the cost of maintaining a regiment for six months, on equipping his own luxurious entourage for the *l'île de Ré* expedition. Lockyer has tried to make Buckingham a credible figure whom we could question on the merits of his policies if he were to hold a press conference tomorrow. But it is helpful to iron out the moral ambivalence of a man to whom James I first made illicit love and then dedicated, in Buckingham's own request, his *Meditations upon the Lord's Prayer*. Or of the generally affable husband who almost became the queen of France's lover and who had to be warned against the notoriously unhygienic whores of Madrid? Such an exotic and incoherent creature remains inaccessible and perhaps indecipherable by any mild and decent historian, inhabiting late twentieth-century Britain.

There was nothing inherently at fault with Buckingham's intentions and policies. There is no reason to suppose that the "opposition", if entrusted with the same power, would have used it differently, or less autocritically. Nor did Buckingham's opponents enjoy a measure of honest public spirit in which the Duke was peculiarly deficient. The faults of the early Stuart polity were not personal but systemic. Years later a commentator observed: "I remember I was in England when the Duke of Buckingham fell, whom many men thought the cause of all the evils; but those that were of that opinion did not find it so afterwards."

And yet Lockyer is not entirely convincing. He seems to me to exaggerate Buckingham's political shrewdness and responsiveness, while the case for his administrative competence and dedication is never made except by assertion. How many hours a month were spent on paper work? We are not told. And if the Lord Admiral did "wonders" for the Navy upon his appointment in 1619, why upon his ships so unfit for service five

Set in Scotland

Julia Briggs

ARTHUR MELVILLE CLARK

Murder Under Trust or the Topical Macbeth: and other Jacobean Matters
195pp. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press. £8.50.
0 7071 0312 5

The scene in *The Merchant of Venice* in which Old Gobbo brings Shylock a present of a dish of dobs is often cited as an instance of Shakespeare's familiarity with a custom peculiar to the Veneto, and sometimes, more dubiously, as evidence that he had actually visited that region. His plays pose many problems of this kind, problems that are not so much uninteresting as unresolvable. What Shakespeare absorbed and how he absorbed it are, in the main, matters for speculation; the scholar is unlikely to convey more than the strength of his own conviction. Arthur Melville Clark's thesis in *Murder Under Trust or the Topical Macbeth* is that Shakespeare here revealed a unique knowledge of Scotland and made exceptional use of contemporary references and complimentary allusions to James I. The latter are not difficult to explain in view of Shakespeare's position as chief dramatist to the newly appointed King's Men, and can be paralleled by examples in *Cymbeline*, or Oberon, and *Julius*, or the unsuccessful gesture to Elizabeth as "a fair vestal throned by the west". This failure to look beyond Macbeth itself is a one-sided familiarity with current scholarship. Written over many years, the book depends heavily on Dover Wilson's edition of the play (itself described as "fairly recent") and is inclined to make surprising assumptions, of which the

following is typical: "Shakespeare proclaims in play after play his profound reverence for the mystique of kingship".

Macbeth, it is argued, reveals detailed knowledge of contemporary Scottish politics and law. A special category of the latter punished "murder under trust", here regarded as Macbeth's characteristic crime. One condition for this charge was the issuing of an invitation and subsequent dispatch of the victim as guest. Banquo is certainly invited to dine with Macbeth, though he never makes it to the feast, and is not actually murdered under Macbeth's roof. Duncan, who is rather thoughtlessly invited, himself, to the Venetian, and sometimes, more dubiously, as evidence that he had actually visited that region. His plays pose many problems of this kind, problems that are not so much uninteresting as unresolvable. What Shakespeare absorbed and how he absorbed it are, in the main, matters for speculation; the scholar is unlikely to convey more than the strength of his own conviction. Arthur Melville Clark's thesis in *Murder Under Trust or the Topical Macbeth* is that Shakespeare here revealed a unique knowledge of Scotland and made exceptional use of contemporary references and complimentary allusions to James I. The latter are not difficult to explain in view of Shakespeare's position as chief dramatist to the newly appointed King's Men, and can be paralleled by examples in *Cymbeline*, or Oberon, and *Julius*, or the unsuccessful gesture to Elizabeth as "a fair vestal throned by the west". This failure to look beyond Macbeth itself is a one-sided familiarity with current scholarship. Written over many years, the book depends heavily on Dover Wilson's edition of the play (itself described as "fairly recent") and is inclined to make surprising assumptions, of which the

following is typical: "Shakespeare proclaims in play after play his profound reverence for the mystique of kingship".

Later chapters detail the clan feuds of the Western Isles and the extraordinary attempt on James's life known as the Gowrie conspiracy, cabalistic letters found in Gowrie's pocket providing a tenuous link with Macbeth's association with the witches. But closer analogies to both episodes are to be found outside *Macbeth*, in the blood feud of *Rosier and Juliet*, or the unsuccessful conspiracy that end *Richard II*, or open Henry V. Further efforts to link the worldly James with that saintly and baffled innocent, Duncan, seem strained, a likelier model being Shakespeare's own Henry VI. Banquo, on the other hand, seems altogether too equivocal; too much the averagely muddled man, to be easily identified with his royal descendant

Disorderly behaviour

Imre Salusinszky

Homosexuality in Renaissance England
140pp. Gay Men's Press. PO Box 24, London. N15 6RW. £7.95.
0 90740 16 0

Homosexuality as currently conceived, according to Alan Bray, dates from the early eighteenth century, with the emergence of an identifiable homosexual sub-culture. It was based around the homosexual taverns, or "molly houses", of London. One of these was rather appealingly described, at a trial of 1726, by an infiltrator from the Societies for the Reformation of Manners: "I found a company of men fiddling and dancing and singing bawdy songs, kissing and using their hands in a very unseemly manner. In a large room there were found one fiddling and eight more dancing country dances." Such

terms were subject to periodic raids and the conviction of mollies led frequently to their execution. There were also, however, long periods in which the mollies were left alone: this rhythm of persecution and toleration, says Bray, served society's purposes by simultaneously concentrating and confining an aberrant group.

A century earlier, the picture had been very different, with homosexuality a less distinct thread in the social fabric. In fact, it had no term of itself, such as "molly", and was contained within a more general notion of "debauchery", this being, in temptation to which all, in principle at least, were subject. "Debauchery" were very rare, and there was a good deal of toleration of homosexual practice, particularly in schools and between masters and servants. This, again, fulfilled a social purpose, as an indirect form of birth control, as a sexual outlet when marriage was commonly delayed for financial reasons.

At the same time, the terms in which

homosexuality was publicly described were apocalyptic ones. Persistently associated with sorcery, papism and treason, it was part of an elaborate Renaissance symbology outlining the universal potential for disorder which lay alongside an equally universal order. It does not try to explain just why homosexuality was part of this symbology - rightly enough, because the question leads out of history and into social anthropology.

Bray proceeds broadly in the mode of Foucault, interested primarily in the terms and categories which were applied to his subject, and in the mutually dependent, disident or repressive institutions generated by those categories. He also traces a similar myth - of a capital Fall - to the one which seems to dominate Foucault's thought, and locates at much the same historical moment the acquisition of a new knowledge (power) of good and evil. Bray's book, however, does not attempt to mimic Foucault's scientism; its clarity and objectivity make it a pleasure to read.

Administering the war

Kenneth O. Morgan

KATHLEEN BURK (Editor)

War and the State: The Transformation of British Government, 1914-1919
189pp. Allen and Unwin. £12.50.
0 04 94065 7

Until quite recently, the First World War was treated by historians of Britain largely in terms of the high political manoeuvrings and rhetoric of statesmen and diplomats, generals and admirals. Increasingly in the past two decades, however, the argument has been opened up, with the impact of war explored in relation to social, economic, cultural and psychological change. Now it seems that the war is being fought over once again to reflect a growing concern with administrative history. This is a theme once associated with discreet inquiries into Chamber or Churchill, but it is now an appealing one for modern historians, as well, committed as they are, by instinct and professional habit, to emphasizing the underlying continuities of life. A *Past and Present* colloquium, in 1969, heralded a new depth and subtlety in the examination of the machinery of government between 1789 and 1914. It produced in 1972 an admirable compendium edited by Gillian Sutherland. A similar academic task force is currently deployed on British government in the 1919-39 period. Now Kathleen Burk, who has had the excellent notion of assembling a joint book to describe the expansion of British government during the First World War, and the state's new range of responsibilities, has produced this

all those concerned with what G. M. Young termed "the administrative temper", as well as among that wider body of students and general readers involved with the revolutionary consequences of the Great War for the making of modern Britain.

The book consists of seven chapters, five by British scholars, two by Americans. The first, by David French, considers the "business as usual" ethic that shaped the running of the war down to the rise of the first coalition government, under Asquith, in May 1915. The author links the general administrative failures of that early period to false perceptions entertained before 1914 about the nature and extent of a future war. The final essay, by Peter Cline, considers the later stages of the war against the background of an intended economic offensive against Germany, with the running down of the war economy and the process of "decontrol". In 1917-19, in between, two chapters, one by Dr Burk herself on the Treasury, and one by John Turner on Cabinet committees and the secretariat, deal with key mechanisms in the central direction of the governmental machine. The other three contributions examine departmental changes newly created during wartime. Cline-Wiley discusses the work of the Ministry of Munitions, on which he has already written a distinguished volume. He details the all-pervasive powers exercised by the Ministry, from the production of explosives to management practices in industry. He shows that the success of Munitions in large measure stemmed from the fact that its various actions were autonomous, rather than centrally controlled. His overall verdict confirms the generally glowing reputation of the Ministry as a dynamic and innovative department, widespread since the publication of the official history and Lloyd George's war

memoirs. The other two areas considered were more strictly demarcated, and left legacies of a kind. The Ministry of Food, well discussed by José Harris, bequeathed a remarkable panoply of local and national rationing controls, which were to be revived with signal success by Woolton and John Strachey in later years. This record of achievement - mainly the work of Lord Rhonda in 1917 with some help from Beveridge - may be contrasted with Rodney Lowe's picture of the Ministry of Labour in 1916-19, which emerges as an enfeebled instrument, hedged about by Treasury restrictions and lacking authority in handling industrial

relations. Some of the individual chapters here undoubtedly make valuable points. Wigley is as lively as ever on the new techniques of the Ministry of Munitions; he provides some useful reassessment not only of Lloyd George, but also of his successors, Montagu, Addison and Churchill. Burk's chapter provides a pioneering account of the role of the Treasury in such novel wartime concerns as international finance, and the control of exchange-rate policy. Her use of the records of Morgan, Grenfell, sheds important light on Anglo-American financial relations in 1915-18 (including arms purchases). The merchants of death seem to have been nowhere there is a considered synoptic assessment of their role. Eric Geddes and Massey have walk-on parts. Lloyd George himself is largely a wizard in the wings, apart from some excellent pages in Wigley's chapters. Wider perspectives seldom intrude: incidental discussion of the post-armistice period. Inadequate, especially on industrial relations, and the role of Sir Allan Smith. Finally, to bive off administrative history, and starkly from political developments, is to miss an essential dimension. The

ghost in the machine is a notable absentee. Wigley's chapter is much the most satisfying for his clear linking of Lloyd George's work at Cabinet with his broader political objectives and style.

Elsewhere, to read of anonymous officials in the Treasury coping with the manipulation of domestic interest rates without guidance from 11 Downing Street; to study the War Cabinet of 1916-18 largely from the blinkered (and often misleading) standpoint of Hankey; to discuss madcap problems in 1917 without reference to the trade unions; to expound the Ministry of Reconstruction, and to glide over the events of December 1-3, 1916, as most of the authors do, is though they offered only a brief interruption to the smooth flow of bureaucratic continuities, is to lose essential perspective. The general handling of the context in which "decontrol" was conceived, is inadequate. For all the precise scholarship of these studies, therefore, the convulsive and cataclysmic impact of war on the social, economic and governmental fabric does not really come through. The imagination at the best of a much more general book like Arthur Marwick's *Deluge* - any somewhat jacking. In comprehending what the war really meant, administration, like patriotism, is poor.

Croom Helm have recently published a collection of ten essays which originated as lectures given in 1981 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Historical Association. *Edwardian England*, edited by Donald Read (189pp. £12.95, paperback, £6.95, 0 7099 1223 4, 0 7099 1227 4, includes "Prologue: The Year 1900" by A. J. P. Taylor and "The Edwardians and the Constitution" by Peter Clarke.

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commentary

Benevolent landscapes of a malignant mind

Frances Spalding

John Linnell
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

At the age of fifty-nine, John Linnell retired to Redhill where he built Redstone Wood on the top of a hill overlooking fine views of the Surrey landscape. Over the years he acquired eighty of the surrounding acres. Much of it was woodland which he kept intact, rarely felling a tree. Like Ivon Hitchens's move to Sussex, where he too built a house on a piece of woodland which he allowed to grow wild, Redstone Wood proved the making of Linnell's career. For the next thirty years until his death in 1982 at the age of ninety he became England's most popular and prolific landscape artist. Inspired by his surroundings, but also aided by photographs and earlier sketches, he ignored the agricultural depression of the 1870s and painted reassuring pastorals in which carts laden with hay lumber through a benevolent landscape under a radiant sunset sky.

The sudden access of fame that accompanied the second half of Linnell's career is reflected in his prices. In 1848 he sold "The Last Gleam of the Storm" for £250 and twenty-four years later learnt that it had been resold at Christie's for £2,500. Only comparatively recently have his paintings begun to fetch more in the salerooms than they did in his heyday, for Linnell has been slower than most Victorian artists to recover from the severe reversal of posthumous reputation. This centennial exhibition offers a welcome opportunity to reassess the work of England's most successful landscape painter after the death of Turner. The catalogue by Katherine Croxall, Cambridge University Press, £18.50, paperback £5.95, 0 521 24737 3) accounts to the first book published on Linnell since Alfred T. Storey's biography of 1893.

Linnell's reputation has been blighted by more than changes in taste. His career has been overshadowed by those of his friends, Blake and Palmer,

and his name has been dogged by a singularly bad press. His forceful character invited dislike: he was opinionated, mean and suspicious; he used others for his own ends, drove hard bargains and was quick to quarrel. A resolute individualist and radical Nonconformist, he distrusted everything from shop-made bread to any form of religious observance that did not proceed from divine authority. Religious differences exacerbated his

relationship with his son-in-law Samuel Palmer. Linnell's grandson, A. H. Palmer, at one time contemplated rewriting his father's life in order to prove that Samuel's declining fortune overbearing father-in-law. Though he never fulfilled his intent, A. H. Palmer's manuscript notes have helped create the accepted image of Linnell, odious and malignant to the last.



Linnell's "The Last Load", 1875, from the exhibition reviewed here.

This exhibition broadens appreciation, both of the man and of his art. Instructed by his teacher John Varley to "Go to Nature for everything", Linnell began in 1806 by painting outdoors with W. H. Hunt, pursuing, like Constable, a belief in natural painting. His early oils,

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noises and shakings of the loose, pendulous mouth. This joke, aptly, is the starting point of the play, which will largely be concerned with what cannot be written down, and though I am reluctantly prepared to believe that a script exists, written by Birago Dlop, it is the physicality of the performance and the improvisational asides that make the evening so delightful.

The basic conflict is between individual vengeance and the tradition of fraternal solidarity which is conducive to the wellbeing of an African village. Meat is a luxury which is seldom available here, and Mor Lam is determined to exclude his enemy, Awa, from the meal that his wife, Moussa, is preparing from the marrow feature death, but the style of the playing and the engaging dance by the Angel of Death (Clement Masdangar) make the subject quite palatable. Mireille Mahout is amusingly distraught as Awa tries to persuade Mor Lam not to go too far, but once having decided that the only way to get rid of Moussa is by feigning disease, he has to go on making the illness more serious, and he is not a man to balk at getting himself buried. Some of Malik Bowen's clowning as Mor Lam may be reminiscent of circus, but the rigor of the performance is not. The play is a comedy, but the very excessiveness of the emotionality seems to be making a statement about the co-presence of joy in violent rage and the undercurrent of fear in violently threatening behaviour. The virtuoso exaggeration is at its best when Bruce Myers, changing his head against a wall, and on the ground in transports of grief, howls in a way that is a message which "consists" of untranslatable

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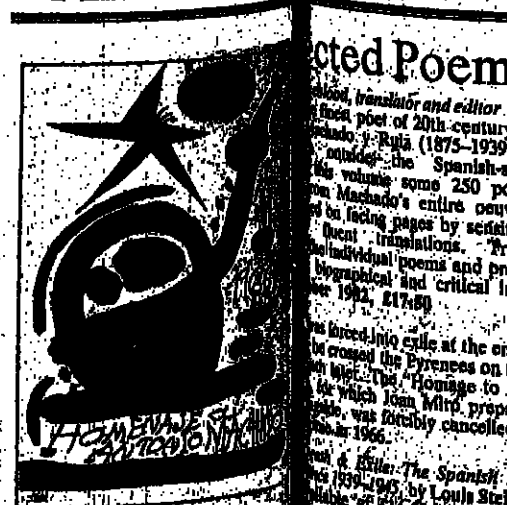
design and rendering of daylight, but to please. He experimented with various styles, momentarily adopting ink, and seems to have been aware of failure. He told Palmer that progress could be made "in pots landscape unless the whole mind and time is devoted to it".

Not until the late 1840s did he settle at a distinctive language of his own. The failure of his biblical landscapes, Katherine Croxall suggests, was partly the result of his Protestantism, partly the High Churchman William Dilke. Linnell could not happily combine his native landscape with figure type drawn from the devotional art of Catholic Italy. Instead he made landscape itself the vehicle for religious expression, creating, Croxall argues, a "system of symbols" out of heaven, storms and sheep, rediscovering the mystical quality in nature which Blake and Palmer had celebrated. Simultaneously he began drawing with the brush in translucent glazes, building up form through multiple strokes. This vibrant technique heightens the pantheistic mood, it gives the same focus to every part that figures merge with their surroundings; and its rhythmic pulse contributes to the compositional movement: both "The Rise of the River" and "The Coming Storm" put in urgency in this agitated handling.

In all the places he lived - Hampstead, Bayswater and Redhill - Linnell witnessed the steady erosion of the countryside; the spread of suburbs helped him his dreams of a rural past. But if motivated by nostalgia, he, for the most part, avoided sentimentality. Unfortunately the poetic was uncovered in his late landscapes is inadequately represented in this show. After the uncertain nature of his career, this exhibition should be ended in triumph with, perhaps, Tate's "Noonday Rest", Abbot's "Under the Hawthorn" and Preslow's "The Fallen Monarch". Moreover the catalogue has been printed (and priced) as a book, it is a pity that it is concerned only with those pictures shown here. There is no discussion of the part played by Linnell's three painter sons in the factory-like production at Redstone Wood, nor of Linnell's experiments with media to attain translucency. Nevertheless the exhibition and its meticulously researched, considered catalogue will do much to arouse Linnell's long sleeping reputation. The exhibition remains at the Fitzwilliam Museum until December 12 and will then be shown at the Yale Center for British Art, January 26 - March 20, 1983.

The British Museum is showing until January 23 an exhibition *Masterpieces of Primitivism from the 15th Century to the French Revolution*. It begins with the earliest German woodcuts, and includes work by Dürer, Rembrandt, Canaletto and Tiepolo.

ANTONIO CHADO



Harvard University Press

The withering of love

Alan Jenkins

HAROLD PINTER
Other Places
Cottesloe Theatre

Two of the three short or very short pieces now offered as *Other Places* turn on Harold Pinter's self-conscious and lightly self-mocking stance with respect to his own by now familiar conventions: one is a stylish distillation of his remarkably consistent preoccupation with the family romance; the other an impatient and throwaway gesture towards a predicament he has always favoured, that of two men left alone in the dark, struggling for the upper hand and trying to mask fear and desire. The third is something of a new departure.

The young man on whose (unwritten?) thoughts or (unwritten?) letters addressed to his mother we eavesdrop throughout *Family Voices* has chosen his other place. It is a substitute home, with all the glamour that burgeoning fantasy can offer: the social glamour of the scarlet Lady Withers and her icily familiar patronage, the sexual glamour of Jane, and the mother-comforts of the boozily glowing Mrs Withers, her romantic past and penchant for a cuddle. Throughout the bulletins, the abandoned mother of "real life" moves from desolation to piqued possessiveness in her replies, and her son's old dependency steadily reasserts itself; not, it is clear, out of sympathy for her plight, but out of growing awareness with his own set-up. The young man may be getting his Withers wrong, or so the shift of real tension and inevitability away from this comedy of omniscience in his dealings with the ladies, onto his encounters with the even more alarming mistress, would imply. "I could crush a slip of a lad like you to death, the death I understand love to be," says one, a "big man", a "police man by trade" called upon to exert a breathtaking self-discipline in the interests of staying on the right side of God: "This is a place of creatures up and down stairs... a catapulling edifice of gross and ramshackle sexualities, opened para-

phernal. Follow me?" opines the older, older occupant. In the face of the grotesque passion and conviction of the young man's justly-effected knowledge melts away; he will return to the fold, the venomous ministrations of his mother, the vengeful shade of his father who died "in lamentation and oath" and whose voice speaks the most chilling words of the piece: "What I have to say to you will never be said." The small comic-horror masterpiece, first seen and heard last year, is expertly revived with Nigel Havers taking the part then played by the

suavely thuggish Michael Kitchen: Havers seems less capable of having made it all up, but is no less compelling for that.

In *Victoria Station* a mini-cab driver languishing by the side of "a dark park" in Crystal Palace, and his increasingly demented controller wrestling over the air-waves with the former's stunned incomprehension and his own raging loneliness, sketch the outlines of a mutual dependency so desperate and so charged with misunderstanding that the controller's promise to "come down there" sounds like a death-threat and the driver's plaintive "Don't leave me" gasped into his car-radio sounds like the cry of a helpless child. The one in his darkened office, the other in his darkened cab, exchange the counters of their trade less and less convincingly, and both eventually give way to escapist fantasy. Fear and loathing in South London take on a music-hall air as the possibility of getting a cab to Victoria Station recedes and a double-act of intermittent and fading interest takes over: will control "go down there" or get the driver back for a nice cup of tea? Has the latter a Passenger On Board, a sleeping girl with whom he has fallen in love, as he says he has, and will he stay in Crystal Palace for ever? Has he perhaps killed the girl? Or assaulted her? Are these things even on his mind? The sketch remains a sketch, a brilliantly economical and quintessentially Pinterish idea that

never begins to look like a play; glowingly isolated faces marooned behind glass and the crackle of the intercom have, initially, a diffused irony and pathos, but the opportunities are wasted.

Victoria Station is not very far from Crystal Palace by car; whereas Alaska connotes in anybody's language a region of unimaginable remoteness and chill. This, a doctor tells his patient, is where her mind has been, for twenty-nine years; she has fallen victim to encephalitis and has woken to a world changed beyond recognition. The idea for *A Kind of Alaska* came, we are told, from Pinter's reading of Oliver Sacks's unforgettable *Awakenings*, and as a *donnée* it is almost unbearably affecting: the gradual breaking of the ice occupies the duration of the play, and Pinter's achievement is to have translated this idea into a wry and un sentimental portrayal of anger, bewilderment and plucky intelligence facing out a single appalling fact. He is aided by the stunning performance of Judi Dench as Deborah, the patient; to a great extent a one-woman show, the piece still allows Paul Rogers and Anna Massey as the doctor and Deborah's sister, also his wife, to come into their own. Yet again, it is a drama of dependency - of a deeply demanding and terrifying family life that is evoked by Deborah's petulant or sharply ironic fragmented memories. A new family, has

established itself around her in the place of the old (mother dead, father gone blind): the sister who has stayed by her has married the doctor but is "widowed" by his devotion to the "sleeping" girl as Deborah learns her circumstances and attempts by short, stabbing asides to get "the matter in proportion" (an unthinkable task) we come to recognize the depth and intensity of their dependence on her. Accounts of the onset of her sickness, her own recall of the "other place", between life and death, to which she has been condemned, and her first steps outside a hospital bed, are riveting; even more so are the slowly surfacing suggestion that she may in some obscure way have willed her withdrawal, and the moment when it looks as if she is about to retreat into it. The mystery of that withdrawal, and what the girl makes and fails to make of her translation by L-Dopa back into consciousness, are stated or implied with a marvellous sureness of touch; though necessarily cutting corners that were fully explored in *Awakenings* Pinter is nowhere in danger of travestying the humane vision behind his source. His own eye may be "clinical" in a sense Sacks would not approve, and his ear is for the gestures of stoical defence and self-preservation grimly familiar from his other plays; yet the compassion and humour of this piece manage to suggest a coming in from the cold rather than a complete surrender to it.

Simplicity and spontaneity

Stanley Wells

SHAKESPEARE

Antony and Cleopatra

The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon

Adrian Noble's current production of *King Lear* at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre is a self-evident piece of director's theatre, as consciously interpretative as many a critical essay, and neither more casual nor less interesting than most specimens of that genre. His *Antony and Cleopatra* is more self-effacing. The square playing-space offers merely a grey floor, an angled upper level, black walls, and a battery of lighting equipment. Production devices are sparing. Changes of location are subliminally signalled, by cold lighting for Caesar's Rome, a warmer tint for Cleopatra's Egypt. The only set-piece is the party on Pompey's galley, which is interpreted by the song is performed on the upper level by a nearly naked, curiously pallid youth while his seniors dance below him, after which he swallows down into their upstaged arms and ends up consoling Enobarbus. As Pompey, Clive Wood strips off his shirt, revealing his well-known ginger chest-hairs, and kisses Antony. There is a suggestion that the abundant sexuality of these warriors seeks satisfaction whatever the circumstances. One episode of foreboding is emphasized by the use of echo-devices. The scene in which soldiers on guard-duty hear music "under the stage", which they ascribe to the departure of "the god Hercules, whom Antony loved", is played on the upper level, the music supplied by humming from characters below, left sleeping from the previous scene, an imaginative device, though one which might confuse the unsophisticated playgoer.

For the rest, simplicity prevails. This is not to deny that the director has exercised firm control over the proceedings, shaping and pacing the action, and determining its emphases. Each scene moves fluently into the next, helped by George Fenton's admirably functional music and by shifts of lighting (for which Leo Leibovici earns exceptional credit). There are no processions, no flamboyant fanfares, properties and furnishings are minimal, costumes simple. Rank is only lightly differentiated. Cleopatra's robe during

most of the play is very similar to Charman's, except that the latter's is less opaque. Regality is little regarded. The stress is on human beings in their personal relationships.

It is a legitimate mode. Probably it is bolder, drabber than that in which the play was conceived. But probably too it is truer to the original than the more conventional production style which essays a visual representation of the play's imagery. No production of *Antony and Cleopatra* seems ever to have provided a theatrical correlative to the text's poetic power. Is the fault Shakespeare's? Is this a play which can be fully realized only in the theatre of the mind?

Adrian Noble's production provides no final answer to these questions, but it does demonstrate that the text can be no less fascinating as chamber music than as grand opera. It is considerably pruned, mostly by the removal of luxuries within speeches. Some characters are doubled. One scene - showing Ventidius's triumph - is, as commonly, omitted. But by and large this is a faithful representation of Shakespeare's play which places the burden of responsibility on actors' realizations of their roles. And this is appropriate, because the play is the product of a phase in Shakespeare's career in which he appears to have been peculiarly concerned with human individuality and its effects on national destiny.

Unfortunately, the drabness of setting is reflected in some of the acting. Bob Peck, in his earlier scenes, plays Enobarbus as a puritan satirist; he is dismissive, reductive. "The barge she sat in... lacks wonder, gives no sense of a man who has been moved in spite of himself. But he and his director between them, create a marvellous stillness for his death scene. As Antony, Michael Gambon seems not yet to have the measure of the small theatre. He is often too loud, sometimes too quick. On the press night, at least, he treated the verse too heavily and was verbally inept. Generally unimpressive, he shows little tenderness, and seems too much the lord and owner of his face to convey the character's varying passions. Emotion is often generalized or expressed elliptically rather than through the fluctuating respect of mind, body and language. He is more credible as the soldier than the lover, convincingly overcome by shame in defeat and excruciatingly fierce in battle.

The human immediacy of the

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remainders

Eric Korn

Admiring the colours of autumnal foliage is probably the most harmless, indeed the most *moral* hobby of Western Men, even though smartass signboards in Bennington, Vermont say "Welcome, Leaf Peekers", which slyly suggests that one is a sort of vegetarian voyeur. (Kew Gardens comes to 42nd Street: peep at the peas without their pods! Watch the almonds getting shucked! The all-nude green show! The Brussels sprout lets it all hang out!) But it isn't so: I mean I know it's an intimate physiological process we are watching here, but where there is no flesh there can be no carnality. So, in an arc from Northern Pennsylvania, through Maine and Quebec across the Laurentian Shield, where short bright hot autumn days encounter frosty dry windless nights, nature's paintbrush goes entirely bananas, or rather strawberries, oranges and tomatoes, for about two weeks a year, but not every year, and not all at once, so there are foliage advisory bureaux, Good Leaf Guides to warn you that the maples don't turn in Maine, or the tamaracs are blighted in the Berkshires, and everyone should head for the Green Mountains or the White Mountains or the Finger Lakes and breathe deeply and glut his eyes and consume pumpkin pie and fresh (nonalcoholic) apple cider and stuff like that. It's a very un-American, indeed a very Japanese thing to do, and if there was a New York-style *sushi* bar in Vermont, everyone would live for ever.

But it must be one of planet's most extraordinary phenomena, probably our only three-star attraction in the galactic Bodeker. Earth (Sol 3): primitive, but by no means unspoil. Dominant native species (bipedal, aerobic) rapacious and xenophobic. Climate uncontrolled. Music and insect life good. Food and sanitation poor to indifferent. Frequent wars (qv). ** Fall foliage in NY, N. America. ** Cora, red, yellow, orange, white, Hermitage (holography prohibited). Interesting mating rituals of several species (three-spined stickleback, European Royal Families). Nearest Astronautical Association Garage: Zeta Eridani (11 parsecs). In fact the region was quite anomalously crowded, and I suspect that many of the cars with out-of-state licence plates were ringers, ready to zip into hyperspace at a word from their owners. Many local newspapers contain editorials that can only be explained as coded messages to extraterrestrial tourists.

In Vermont I went to a craft fair, not very different from many another, but got to identify a style I hadn't precisely particularized before. Barley, yet airy; cosy, but whimsical; in a word, furry. It embraces: jewellery made from unpolished stones; stained glass or leather; furniture that cannot be sat on; mirrors too enamoured to reflect accurately; comfortable pillows figuring cats or women with flowers in their hair and self-reliant expressions; boxes that will not usefully hold anything except small quantities of rare and illicit compounds, whose presence they flagrantly advertise; twigs and larger pieces of wood, into the natural development of which the craftspeople has intervened only slightly, albeit expensively; masks, if non-figurative, of, not Gaudi or Margaret Thatcher, very precise representations of ecologically ideal happenings in unsuitable materials ("carvings" the beauty of the forest floor in porcelain); winged creatures, either holly (pigs, hippos) or mythological calligraphy (you will be astounded as you learn that "it" is alive and well in 1982, along with Lao Tse, the Vivekananda and Doris Poles Schmitz); macramé, tatami, origami, parched. Habitat and happy tar have combined to give birth to Hobbitat.

Hottest property in the NY bookshops - and, shortly, no doubt the hottest property in the remainder stores - is, as always, the "how-to", specifically the "how-to-be" book. There are two,

competing, versions of the *Official J.A.P. Book*; two versions of the *Official* (everything is official) *Valley Girl Book*. Valley Girls live in, or rather originate in the San Fernando Valley which is like, you know, Encino, which is like, you know, LA? Which is like you know, gnarly? They are as different from the Marin County heroine of last year's how-to-be-book, *The Serial* (or was it *The Cereal*?) as Northern California from Southern California, as Haight-Ashbury from Disneyland, as tofu from taco (or chalk from cheese, which is nearly the equivalent). JAPs are Jewish American Princesses, which you don't have to be the daughter of a Jewish Mum to be one of. Last year or last week it was preppies; next month Tribeca flatshavers or Westchester Wasps or the new aristocrats of the condo and the cheap flight to Miami ("Of course he's in Florida, snarled one Park Ave boutique to another about a third, "it's the weekend, isn't it?"). What it won't be is hillbillies or laid-off carworkers or Haitian refugees, because what the famous-for-fifteen-minutes brigade have to have in common is conspicuous consumption, uniform accessories, a few brand names and a core vocabulary that need not exceed half a dozen words or so. (Valley girls say "gnarly" and "blinging", I forget what Jewish American Princesses say.)

I notice, on my return to London, that the *Official Sloane Ranger Handbook* has just been published. Soon, doubtless, the Grove Grooves, the Covent Garden Grooves, the Channel Four Chaps. It is as authentic as the computer-generated personal touch: "Hello there, MR KORN OF KENTISH TOWN. My goodness, MR KORN, do you realize you could be the first person in KENTISH TOWN to take advantage of this stunning offer . . . Only sometimes, they say "Hello there MR KORN DECEASED" or "Hello there MR KORN TRY UPPER BELL OF KENTISH TOWN", bless their inadequate chips. Not forgetting all the things manufactured in Wolverhampton that say "It's CUMBERLAND / KIRKCUDBRIGHT TWIN FALLS, IOWA, a recipe custom-souvenir. My LOVER went to BLOOMSBURY and all he brought me back was this stupid T-shirt."

And herewith an instructive comparison of British and US styles in what prize call "biblia abilita" - unbooks.

On my British (specifically Scottish) left, *The Book of Smiles* by Robert Baldwin and Ruth Paris (150pp, RKP, £6.95); on my right, Laurence Urdang and G. Ruffner Jr's *Allusions - Cultural, Literary, Biblical and Historical: A Thematic Dictionary* (xx+464pp, Gale Research Co, Detroit, £45). The latter appears to have been written by an ill-informed computer, the former in the intervals of a game of tennis. On our side, the modest preface ("essentially a light-hearted and arbitrary selection"), the funny pictures by David Austin, the very type-faces and format, proclaim that we are just amateurs - talented amateurs of course - and must be indulged. The list of acknowledgments is brief, eclectic, worldly: Kingsley Amis and Denis Healey, Patrick Moore and Frank Muir, Adrian Henri and Terry Wogan. Then follow some 2,000 more-or-less striking similes, arranged under what we might call the comparandum, with the comparator's name, but no fuller reference: "Dead, as a holiday resort in winter (anon)", as a pickled walnut (Raymond Chandler), as a dog in a ditch (Samuel Rowlands), dead, as an eider (anon), as a haddock (anon). The choice of head-word is not always predictable: "Redford fell upon his smoked salmon like a stayed dingo (Jilly Cooper)" is under "eat", which is fair enough, but "normally shy English breasts heather the beach (Norman)" is under "topless bathing", where one would hardly think of looking. Graham Greene's fine, "Buller was looking his private parts with the gusto of an underman drinking

soap" is under "gusto", which is unhelpful (there is, thank God, a parenthetical note that Buller is a dog). The book depends rather heavily - absurdly heavily - on Raymond Wandler, with back-up from Wodehouse, Amis (Kingsley and Martin), James (Clive in quantity but not, apparently, Henry), William McIlvanney, Anon (Ozark) who gets off quite a few good things, and Douglas Adams, the galactic hitchhiker. Poets come off poorly: Wordsworth contributes "lonely . . . as a crow on the sands", which is a pleasant change from a cloud, and there is D. Thomas and at least one Craig Raine and plenty of Roger McGough, but no Eliot - at least there is no Eliot entry for "evening" or "wearily", two images which for good or ill informed the literary sensitivities of a generation. I could find nothing of a generation. I could find nothing of a generation. I could find nothing of a generation.

There is an index (one up on the British work) so that if you look up *Oedipus* you are directed to BANISHMENT, BLINDNESS, INCEST, MURDER and REMORSE - which summarizes his career fairly well. As a blind person, he has twenty-three fellow sufferers (if you count the three blind mice as one), coded from 69.1 to 69.24, including *Blind Pew*, *Louis Braille*, *Cupid*, *Gloucester*, *Homer*, *Helen Keller*, the mole ("said to lack eyes: Medieval Animal Symbolism: White 95-96") *St Paul* (who was neither Saint nor Paul when blinded), *Polyphemus*, *Tobit* and *Zedekiah*, but not Milton, bats or Hecate. The references for *Keller* and *Homer* are respectively "Am. Lit. Walchinsky 13" and "Gk. Hist. Walchinsky 13", that is to say the eminent blind in David Walchinsky's *at's* estimable *Book of Lists*, which I think is cheating. In fact despite its pretensions, Urdang and Ruffner is a glorified Book of Lists, and though ludicrously inadequate as a reference book provides a few pleasantly surreal assemblages.

Five cases of RASHNESS: Charge of the Light Brigade; *Gilpin*, John; *Icarus*; *Leah*; *Uzzah* (rashly grabs Ark of Covenant, a transgression). Four examples of REDHEADEDNESS: *Cortes*, *Esau*, *Judas Iscariot*, *Little Orphan Annie*. Five examples of USURY (four with epithets): *Fledgeby*, cowardly and deceitful moneylender; *Grise*, *Arthur*, extorting moneylender; *Milo*, loaned gold for huge interest rates and sexual favours; *Nathan*, *Ralph*, avaricious and ungenerous moneylender; *Shylock*, avaricious and avaricious moneylender.

I wish I had time to consider more fully the case of ENTRAPMENT (*Feet of Flying*, *Ethan Frome*, *Will Loman*, *J. Alfred Prufrock*, *Edward Rumbold Rieu*, *REQUIEM* (see also REMORSE), an emotion experienced by *Epimetheus* ("husband of Pandora, afterwards thought better of opening box"), *Nathan Hale*, who of course regretted that he had only one life to give for his country, *Moses*, who regretted not entering the promised land, and - a separate entry - *Mount Nebo*, where he did his regretting, and finally, *rasberry* "symbol of regret

much as in settling down. He seems more than once to "head back exaggerating"; otherwise it might be inferred that with him a normal dog began with an official intention that his pension had been reduced and ended with the discovery that he pocket had been picked. But there are signs that in financial matters he has the foresight of the Belgian lady who in one of his many stories, figures as having bought a birthday present for her husband a "melancholy-looking black tie", and as having thus damaged the objection that it was unduly expensive for the occasion: "You see, Garry, getting very old and shabby and never knows what may happen. Now I buy most things black."

So much for the author's Stalkydom. It is common knowledge that there are other aspects to his personality, for he has written elsewhere of his thirty-five years in the Army. "Stalky's" chief subject is what he calls his civilian re-education: from what he tells us about it the problem to which it gave rise consisted in settling up at least as

Aleksandr Pushkin's short story about the downfall of the gambler German (Russ. Lit. Benet, §33). The reference list doesn't give Pushkin, or *Queen of Spades* but explains "Benet" as William Rose Benet's *Readers' Encyclopedia*, 2nd edn 1965. When sources are given they are usually, but inconsistently, recent paperback translations. Page references are not given on the shaky grounds that many allusions occur through a text.

I've a bone to pick with Urdang anyway, who is the editor of a widely entertaining (light-hearted, whimsical) magazine of pop linguistics; the letters column is headed "epistole", the sic!, and a rather good story about Japanese Deli whose *facta* about "Japanese Dairy" is told twice. His magazine is called *Verbatim* or *Verbatum*, not *Verbatim*, but *Verbatum* (the U.S. Pat. Off. Does this mean that Urdang owns or part-owns the word? That I must pay him a use fee whenever I quote something verbatim and say, verbatim, that I am quoting Verbatum verbatim? Does it even mean that I can't edit another magazine called Verbatim, devoted to lexical analysis or stenography or mnemonics? Just let him try to say me: I'll change my name to Thendy Verbatum if necessary, and on the matter of *Verba*, Tim. But it becomes a professed dissemination of the love of words to try and grab a bit of the best ones for himself.

Nobody carries bumper stickers any more, except the kind of people who don't know that nobody carries bumper stickers any more, and they tend to display sordid notices like GLASSBLOWERS DO IT WITH THEIR CHEEKS CRACK, A ANTIQUARIAN BOOKSELLER DO IT IN A RING. One use (the use) of CB might be to address, in tone of reason and restraint ("with there is a certain specious logic in what you say, I can indicate the fallacy of it will spare me a few moments") those exhibiting opinions like GLASS CAUSE CRIME LIKE FLIES CAUSE GARBAGE. (An alternative option might be to pull out your Magnum or Kalashnikov and blow them away.) The wickedest sign seen on a sign reading MY BOSS IS A MORE PEOPLE HAVE DIED THAN TEDDY KENNEDY'S COIN IS IN THE USA. The best triple-into came from a sign reading MY BOSS IS A JEWISH CARPENTER, which I thought was just a piece of party religious humour (I've always wanted to use that word, I wonder if I have it right) until I saw that the van carrying belonged to Levine Lumper Corp.

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Jonson and Shakespeare

Sir, - In his review of *Shakespeare's Impact on his Contemporaries* (October 8), Graham Bradshaw writes that "we do not know what Jonson made of Shakespeare's art where it was most radically unlike his own. . . . Would Jonson have argued that Macbeth's 'If it were done soliloquy' lacked 'perspicuity'?" Mr Bradshaw implies that Jonson would have admired the soliloquy - an unfortunate example, since Dryden records that "in reading some bombast speeches of Macbeth, which are not to be understood, he [Jonson] used to say that it was horror".

Mr Bradshaw believes that Jonson's enthusiastic eulogy on Shakespeare represents his "true attitude", whereas I suggest that Jonson's attitude fluctuated: it could be admiring, but also envious, condescending, even scornful. Why not? Jonson's attitude to other gifted rivals - Inigo Jones, say, or John Marston - also changed with the times. Mr Bradshaw shares Jonson's turbulent temperament, the satiric thrust of so many of his allusions, and even regards himself that Jonson didn't grant it when Drummond thought he said "that Shakespeare wanted art". It was because too many biographers absurdly simplify "gentle Shakespeare" that I have re-examined contemporary opinions of the man and his works: I did not realize that Jonson might need to be rescued as well.

E. A. J. HONIGMANN,
School of English Language and Literature, The University, Newcastle upon Tyne.

'The Taming of A Shrew'

Sir, - A well-meant editorial insertion in my review of the Stratford production of *The Taming of the Shrew* (Commentary, October 22) attributes to me the belief that *The Taming of A Shrew* is a "source play". In fact I share the view of the Oxford and Arden editors that the play printed anonymously in 1594 is a derivative of Shakespeare's play, not a source for it.

STANLEY WELLS,
40 Walton Crescent, Oxford OX1 2JQ.

Edmund Ironside

Sir, - Richard Proudfoot (Letters, October 22) and I at least agree that the phrases common to *Richard II* and *Edmund Ironside* derive from a single source. But he said he found it

Competition No 94
Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than November 19. A prize of £10 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date, or falling short of the most nearly correct - or, if the case inspired guesswork will be taken into consideration.

Entries, marked "Author, Author" on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Priory House, 10 John's Lane, London EC1M 4BX. The solution and results will appear on November 26.

and invites thought of the way the new Telegraph writes, which pricks down its little sharp sentences spitefully as if they got more than you'd like to rightfully. A school-house plant on every hill stretching in radiate nerve-lines the quick wires of intelligence: all North and South together brought shall own the same electric thought. And, heiterforth, there shall be no chain, no undermirth; this sea the wires shall murmur through the main Sweet songs of Liberty.

the conscious stars accord above, the waters will below, and under through the cable-wave, Her Barry errands go. A province or protectorate is spread The place straightway to vast proportions jumps As with the golfie or a dose of mumps.

Roy Campbell, "A Veld Eclogue: The Expansion of Europe, 1968."

hard to resist the thought that the latter play was the later. Challenged to say why, he explains that *Ironside* "appears to echo" *Richard II*. He calls this a simple reason for allocating priority, but it looks to me like the same question-begging assumption as before. He ignores the arguments and authorities I cite for an *Ironside* dating of 1587 - c 1590, long before *Richard II* was written.

His new Spenser point was duly noted by each of *Ironside's* editors (Boswell in 1927 and Everett in 1954) who however drew no such conclusions. Unlike them, Proudfoot assumes that Canute's *Bragadochio* is a deliberate reference to the *Pericle* *Queene* character, and claims OED authority for regarding that word as a Spenserian invention. The assumption seems to me obviously wrong, and the claim ill-founded. Further, the OED compilers aimed to cite earliest known usages, almost all from printed books; how can one such instance rationally be constructed as a terminus for a manuscript source, still undated and then unknown, which contains more than 2,000 different words? So far from being "strong evidence" which "some may even think conclusive", it's manifestly no real evidence at all.

ERIC SAMS,
32 Arundel Avenue, Sanderstead, Surrey CR2 8BB.

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40 Walton Crescent, Oxford OX1 2JQ.

Author, Author

Glasgow a race of cannibals has really existed, we may contemplate in the period of the Scottish history the opposite extremes of savage and civilized life. Such reflections tend to enlarge the circle of our ideas, and to encourage the pleasing hope that New Zealand may produce in some future age the Hume of the Southern Hemisphere.

Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 24.

2 He loathed the promiscuity and publicity of even the good restaurants. The promiscuous feeding gave him feeling of disgust. So he walked down the beautiful slope to the water again, and sat on a seat by himself, near a clump of strange palm-trees that made a weird noise in the breeze. The water was blue and dancing, and again he felt as if the harbour were wild, lost, and undiscovered, as it was in Captain Cook's time. The city wasn't real.

D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, chapter 16.

3 Geographers, who say the world's a sphere, Are utter ignorant, or mazed with beer, Or liars - or have never read two pages. Of any of our novelists or sages Who tell us plainly that the world's more wide.

Roy Campbell, "A Veld Eclogue: The Expansion of Europe, 1968."

to the editor

Swift and Temple

Sir, - In his otherwise eminently fair review of A. C. Elias's *Swift at Moor Park* (October 15), Matthew Hodgart finds it disappointing that there is "very little . . . on the possibility that Swift was a bastard of Temple's", and he remarks that "it is now unfashionable to look at the evidence".

There is confusion here. It is now unfashionable to mistake rumour and assertion for evidence. As far as I am aware, there is no contemporary evidence to suggest that Swift was either the natural son of Sir John Temple or of Sir William Temple, although rumour hinted that Swift was the son of the latter after he arrived at Moor Park over twenty-one years later. True, Sir John Temple was in Ireland when Swift was conceived, but so was Jonathan Swift, senior. Sir William Temple was then in Holland.

So much for the contemporary evidence. It seeks to explain Sir William Temple's patronage of an obscure young Irishman in 1689. However, Swift and Sir William himself offer a much more mundane reason for their relationship. First Swift himself:

The Troubles then breaking out, he went to his Mother, who lived in Leicester, and after continuing there some Months, he was received by Sir Wm Temple, whose Father had been a great Friend to the Family. . . .

Such an explanation is endorsed by Temple's letter of May 29, 1690 to Sir Robert Southwell. Supplying Swift with a reference, Temple notes that he has good friends though they have for the present lost their fortunes in Ireland and his whole family have been long known to mee obliged me thus far to take care of Him.

Now it is conceivable that Sir John Temple's "great friendship" for the Swift family included adultery with Swift's mother. But there is no evidence for it. If there is any, I should be glad to see it. Otherwise, we must simply conclude that Jonathan Swift senior was the father of Jonathan Swift junior, that Sir John Temple was a great friend to the family in Ireland, and that his son, Sir William Temple, was prepared to extend that friendship to Swift at Moor Park a generation later. Anything else, in the absence of evidence, is mere conjecture.

J. A. DOWNIE,
Goldsmith's College, University of London, London SE14.

Jerome K. Jerome

Sir, - By way of balancing the views expressed in *A Half of Two Lives* by Mrs Alison Waley, may I be permitted to direct your readers' attention to the Arthur Waley-Beryl de Zoete correspondence? Their letters,

30 Staines Road, Twickenham, Middlesex.

Among this week's contributors

RUDOLF ARNHEIM's most recent book *The Power of the Center: A Study of the Continuity of Tradition in Art*. He was co-organizer of the Royal Academy's Post-Impressionist exhibition.

JULIA BROOKE's *This Stage-Play World: English Literature and its Background 1580 - 1625* will be published next year.

M. T. CLANCHY is Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Glasgow.

PATRICK COLLINSON's *Archbishop Grindal 1519 - 1593: The Struggle for a Reformed Church* was published in 1980.

TIM DOOLEY edits the poetry magazine *Green Lines*.

JOHN H. DUNLOP is the author of *The New Russian Revolution*, 1976.

JULIAN GRAFTY is a lecturer in Russian Literature at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, London.

J. D. HARGREAVES's books include *The Expansion of Europe*, 1968.

spanning a number of years, are deposited at Rutgers University Library, New Jersey, USA, under the care of Mr F. A. Johns. Mr Johns kindly granted me access to these letters in 1966. The strong and lasting impression I gained from reading them is of two good companions, ideally suited to each other by temperament, background and professional pursuit.

Since the primary principle of biography is: *audi alteram partem*, perhaps the time has come for the Waley-de Zoete letters to be edited and published? The dead may then speak for themselves beyond the grave.

A. M. BIRRELL,
Saint Patrick's, 33 Irwin Road, Guildford, Surrey.

'Monsignor Quixote'

Sir, - In his review of Graham Greene's novel *Monsignor Quixote* (October 8), Julian Symons casts doubt on Greene's oft-praised accuracy of observation, claiming that, "In small matters Graham Greene is often a faulty recorder." To judge from his review, so is Mr Symons. He refers to the "whisky priest" of *The Power and the Glory* as Father José, and the subtitle is not *A History of My Early Childhood* but *A History of My Early Life*.

The review alludes to "the bogus Hudson". Some justification for the epithet should have been offered.

DAVID R. DEWAR,
36 Singleton Scarp, Woodside Park, London N12.

'Rocket to the Moon'

Sir, - Harold Hobson is quite right about the missing character in Clifford Odets's *Rocket to the Moon* (Commentary, September 17). In March next year Methuen will republish the play (in *Six Plays* by Clifford Odets), and we are reproducing the 1939 edition published by the Modern Library, New York. This gives a cast list showing that the part of Salesman in the Group Theatre premiere on November 24, 1934, in New York was taken by William Challee. However, "Salesman" makes no appearance in the text of the play.

Obviously it's a question of successive versions, but it's intriguing that the character was apparently cut for publication in 1939 but re-appeared in the London production in 1948. I assume that Odets's agent sent the London company the earlier, unrevised version, forgetting the existence of the published edition. Does any Odets expert know more?

NICHOLAS HERN,
Methuen London Ltd, 11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4A.

JOHN MORRIS's books include *Poll: A History of the Medieval Times*, 1958.

KENNETH O. MORGAN's most recent book is *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880 - 1980*, 1980.

BLAKE MORRISON's *Seamus Heaney* was published earlier this year.

DAVID PARNAU is the author of *Science in the Social Sciences 1978*, and *Theory and Meaning*, 1980.

VERNON REYNOLDS's books include *The Apes*, 1967, and *The Biology of Human Ape*, 1980.

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MALCOLM SCHROEDER's *An Essay on Anaxagoras* was published in 1980.

PETER SCUTHAM's collection of poems *Summer Palaces* was published in 1980.

WILFRID MELLER's books include *Bach and the Dance of God*, 1979.

'Still Waters'

Sir, - An Author's Note, prefacing James Vance Marshall's novel *Still Waters*, informed the reader and reviewer (myself) (September 3) that details of the Penan people and their habitat had been provided by members of a "scientific expedition" which spent more than a year in Borneo. Since the author was clearly not a member of this scientific expedition, I wrongly jumped to the conclusion that he had not himself visited the Penan. I have since learned from Mr Marshall's publisher, Michael Joseph, that he did in fact visit the tribe he wrote about in his novel. I apologize for this slip.

ROBERT BRAIN,
Grosseto, Italy.

W. H. Hudson

Sir, - In his review of *Birds of a Feather* (September 17) Redmond O'Hanlon states that in 1869 W. H. Hudson "set sail for London". The correct date is 1874. He is also in error in asserting that *Far Away and Long Ago* was written in Brighton; and the subtitle is not *A History of My Early Childhood* but *A History of My Early Life*.

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An instrument for ambition

Peter Shaw

DAVID GRAYSON ALLEN, ROBERT J. TAYLOR, MARC FRIEDLAENDER and CELESTE WALKER (Editors)

Diary of John Quincy Adams
Volume 1 November 1779-March 1786. Volume 2 March 1786-December 1788.
415, and 521pp. Kelnap/Harvard University Press. £42 the set.
0 674 204204

The long-awaited appearance of John Quincy Adams's youthful diary brings into print the beginning of the most extensive and most representative portion of the vast Adams family archive. Among all the diaries, letters, and papers accumulated from 1750 to 1850, representing three of the family's four prominent generations, nothing matches this seventy-year-long diary's accumulation of family and national history.

The present volumes begin in 1779 with John Quincy, then twelve, making his second trip to Europe with his father, who was a Revolutionary War Peace Commissioner for the fledgling United States. They run to 1788, his twenty-first year, by which time he had attended Harvard College and nearly completed his legal studies in the small New England town of Newburyport, Massachusetts. The boy grows into maturity while travelling and studying in Spain, France, the Netherlands, Russia, Sweden, and England. Under his father's guidance he acquires what every Adams father wished for his sons: a familiarity with languages, places, important people, and the classics. The formalities of the young teenager's education strike a modern, psychological eye as constrictingly inimical to the flowering of talent. Yet it cannot be denied that for the most part the young man flourished. To account for this phenomenon is to gain a major insight not only into the evolution of John Quincy Adams, but also into the process of the Adams family's dearly bought prominence in eighteenth and nineteenth-century America.

On John Quincy's first trip to Europe, at the age of nine, he had failed to comply with his father's suggestion that he keep a diary "of objects that I see, and of Characters that I converse with from day to day", as he put it at the time. When he took up the project on his second trip, he began with considerable diffidence. At first he confined himself to external events: the weather at sea, the ten or twelve miles travelled overland each day in crossing from Spain to France. At each stop, rather than offer his own impressions of places, he copied passages from guidebooks to fill out his daily entries. As a result, it is only by consulting letters to his mother, brothers and sister that one learns, for example, how he regarded his and his father's painfully slow progress across Spain - "a terrible journey".

John Quincy's "almost" purely external account continues, after a break for the time that he spent at school in Paris, with the Netherlands and his schooling there; it then goes on to Russia, where at the age of thirteen and a half he served as private secretary to the diplomat and family friend, Francis Dana. In St. Petersburg, Adams recorded such information as how low the Réaumur thermometer could drop early in the Russian winter (to the "minimum" of minus 31 Fahrenheit or 35 Centigrade). Aside from the remark that one of the guidebooks from which he was copying represented Dutch tradesmen to be more honest than they really were, there is little to reveal the diary's character of thoughts.

Only the theatre touched John Quincy enough to provoke comment in his diary. During his first week in Spain he reported that "the actors are very indifferent", a comment that seems to echo one of the adults in the American party. But within a short time his own observations proved to be surprisingly sophisticated: clearly, the theatre genuinely engaged his sensibility. By the age of sixteen Adams had been exposed not only to the classical theatre and contemporary opera, but

also to the sexual forces of the day. What he thought about these latter he never revealed, but a Grétry opera had on him "rather an effect of enchantment than of art". Later, the theatre awakened Adams's critical spirit to its first cultural observations. In London he compared English acting, which he found affected, with what he judged to be a more convincing style practised in France. In Paris he observed that whereas in a dispute about seating a French usher had decided in favour of a gentleman, in England the opposite would have been the case.

At eighteen, widely travelled, comfortable in French, treated everywhere with the deference due to the son of a diplomat, John Quincy was faced with a decision. He could reap the rewards of his familiarity with Europe, where he had reason to hope for advancement through his father's influence, or start anew in his native country. In America, he would be confined within what he called "the Pale of a College", Harvard, after which he would have to endure three years of "the Dry and tedious study of the law". While in Europe, where Adams was very much on his own, he had gone from being a youth described by his mother as "formed with a constitution feelingly alive" and subject to "passions", to imposing on himself a discipline that went beyond his parents' rigorous standards of virtue and work. For the austere Adams type that John Quincy had made himself, the self-sacrifices involved in returning to America represented an irresistibly attractive prospect.

As luck would have it, when he did return to America at the age of eighteen (after a seven year absence), Adams's throttled nature found something of an outlet in relationships with young ladies. Starting on his third day back he made his diary into a kind of textbook on the varieties of female beauty and behaviour. Typically, he flattered himself that he was developing moral principles for judging women. And he convinced himself that his own desires ran far more to imagination and "sensitivity" in a woman than to mere beauty.

While boarding in Haverhill, Massachusetts, where he went to study Latin and Greek for the Harvard entrance examination, Adams also came to believe that in preference to more conventional signs of beauty, he possessed a "gothic taste" for strong, dark, feminine features - though only when these were combined with an admirable character. In fact, he fell in love with a conventionally attractive girl who had "ingrossed the attentions of almost every youth in Haverhill", and who was a flirt. This was Nancy Hazen - "Miss Nancy" in his diary - who for a time lived at the house where he boarded.

"I consider it the greatest misfortune that can befall a young man to be in Love", Adams told himself. "I have still more Reason than

I ever had, to repress my feelings." If ever there was a society ideally suited to systematic repression, the America that Adams had returned to was it. In Europe a proper young man like himself was for the most part kept away from young girls, and certainly could look only from afar at sexually explicit older women. But that was restraint, not repression. In America one found oneself alone in parlours with girls, and escorted them home alone from dances. Nevertheless what looked like unrestrained freedom rested entirely on repression.

Small-town New England seemed almost to be located on a different planet from Europe. There were no plays. A Massachusetts minister could violently, if unsuccessfully, oppose dancing. Another could deliver an unreconstructed Calvinist sermon assuring his parishioners that they had no free will with which to resist their own probable damnation. In John Quincy's own home town, "as familiar to me, as if I had not been absent", Parson Wibird delivered the same sermons that John Adams had sat through thirty years before.

In society, John Quincy found to his surprise, people were much "attached to ceremony and etiquette" - the revealing marks of provinciality. At the social gatherings everyone "must be fixed down, in Chairs, looking at one another, like a puppet show", and talking local scandal.

Adams felt easily enough into the social styles of his homeland. He objected to the conspicuous consumption represented by a wealthy Bostonian, and he recorded his disapproval when a pregnant lady indecently appeared in public. On the one hand he attended dances and got together with other youths to go serenading late at night. But on the other hand when he quoted Horace to himself in his diary he stopped just before the lines: "Nor in thy youth neglect sweet love nor dances, whilst life is still in its bloom." At Harvard College he held aloof from student high jinks and the seemingly regular breaking of tutors' windows (at least seven times, by his report, during the year that he spent there).

Between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one John Quincy Adams developed the massive, Puritanical seriousness that distinguished the men in his family. His physical appearance was unprepossessing: short and already plump, he raised a spontaneous laugh when at college he was assigned to recite the lines about "the justice / In fair round belly with good capon lined" from Jacques' "Seven Ages of Man" speech. But as the Reverend John Shaw, in whose house he boarded, pointed out to him, his fervent tenacity in argument made him seem "obstinate, and dogmatical, and pedantic". Furthermore Lucy Cranch, who wrote, "tells me I have no Complaisance in me, and I suspected as much before". By "complaisance" the young lady seems to have been

referring to social ease and pleasantness, notoriously lacking in all Adamses. John Quincy Adams proved to be less rough around the edges than his father - undoubtedly because of his exposure to European manners. But his development was just as surely towards a hardening of the personality and a chilling public manner.

It was no wonder that his chosen régime of self-discipline and self-improvement should produce a rigid character. He spent months intensively preparing Greek and Latin for the Harvard entrance examination. Once admitted he never skipped a lecture, even when some of the professors began to repeat themselves. At graduation he achieved the second highest distinction in his class. Nevertheless he felt a constant sense of incompleteness. "The more I do," he wrote, "the more I find to do." After college he went to Newburyport to work and study in a law office. Here his eyes began to weaken from overwork. Yet it was without irony that he lamented his slow progress in the extra-curricular reading that he set for himself. "I shall never get through Gibbon", he wrote in his diary. "Indolence, indolence, I fear will ruin."

By now the onerous task of keeping his "Daily Narrative of Yesterday's" diary had become a measure of his tenacity in general. Later in life the diary would record his public service. But for now it served the same purpose as had the diary of the young John Adams: it was, in Steven Kagle's phrase, an "instrument for ambition". For John Adams the exercise of diary keeping was sufficient in itself: he rarely, if ever, looked over what he had written. In contrast John Quincy began going back over his own entries almost immediately. Some two months after beginning the diary he constructed an index showing the number of times each person was mentioned. He worked at various kinds of indexes throughout his life, all the time disparaging what he called, after looking over a two-year accumulation on New Year's Eve while at college, his "heap of trash".

By then, the end of 1786, the diary contained observations and poems about the young ladies of New England, college compositions and orations, and a series of character sketches of Harvard classmates. Adams periodically went back to note these sketches as later life proved his assessments right or wrong. In separate notebooks he accumulated literary and poetic extracts, Latin and Greek phrases and translations, his own poems and translations, and his letters.

Despite all his compulsive thoroughness, John Quincy managed to keep a personal record far less intimate than the diary form might seem to promise. He rarely looked inward, so that his character tended to be revealed by indirection. That he was unromantic both by constitution and conviction, for example, is evident from his lack of sympathy for *Werther* contrasted with his enthusiastic approval of *Tom Jones*. As for his feelings at a given moment, these are best inferred from the length and frequency of his diary entries themselves. Full entries, even when they say little about Adams's activities, indicate busy and productive days. Short entries, which are less usual, reveal relative lassitude and boredom.

If Adams's faithfulness to his diary measured his progress in self-improvement, his increasing complaints about the daily burden of writing it pointed to an accompanying psychological strain. In 1788 that strain finally began to take its toll. Adams was then sixteen and pushing ahead with his law studies in Newburyport. One day he reported a "depression of spirits to which I have hitherto been entirely a stranger". This was accompanied by "the most extravagant delirium". Two months later he suffered a week of "low spirits". He began to find it impossible to adhere to his study schedule and shifted to making one-line entries in his diary. A few months further on he had to ask the local doctor for an opiate in order to sleep. With that he decided to return to his

home town of Braintree for a while with his parents, who had returned from Europe. Here he must have suffered some kind of collapse, signalled by the only broken entry in his diary: "I think I am in a very low state of mind. This evening, my father and mother were very kind to me."

Some years ago the physician David Musto, suggested that Adams broke down at this point because he could no longer sustain the burden of family expectations and demands. The present editors of the diary have induced guilt, despite his recognition of the need for relaxation, and his anxiety and depression.

The return of John and Adams from Europe suggests that young John's condition is viewed as certain light both explanations could be accepted. Everything that Adams wrote about his ambitions and responsibilities points to his father's imposed upon by them. This was turned twenty-one he remarked that he was now emancipated "from the paternal authority which I had felt". Not surprisingly, then, when he began to collapse, he rushed home rather than away from his parents. He was not mistaken in doing so. He once with them he quite felt apart. He also recovered at the family he sufficiently to return to Newburyport.

Given the high-toned admonition that John Quincy's parents specified in it, it is not surprising that he should feel at ease with them and suffer the expectations. Quite simply, he had internalized their demands and thereby made himself his own draconian watchdog. Once again the process could best be seen in the progress of his diary. In Europe he had been more faithful in writing than when separated from his father. In contrast John Quincy began going back over his own entries almost immediately. Some two months after beginning the diary he constructed an index showing the number of times each person was mentioned. He worked at various kinds of indexes throughout his life, all the time disparaging what he called, after looking over a two-year accumulation on New Year's Eve while at college, his "heap of trash".

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RUSSIA

Reform from within

John B. Dunlop

STEPHEN F. COHEN (Editor)

An End to Silence: Uncensored Opinion in the Soviet Union, from Roy Medvedev's underground magazine, "Political Diary".
Translated by George Saunders
75pp. Norton. £14.25.
0 393 01491 6

Between October, 1964 and March, 1971, a limited-circulation samizdat journal, edited by the Moscow-based historian Roy Medvedev, made the rounds of select representatives of the Party, scientific and cultural intelligentsia. Entitled *Political Diary* (Politicheskiy dnevniki), the journal, unlike most samizdat publications of the period, was aimed at a highly restricted readership - some forty or fifty persons in all. Its aim, in the words of Stephen F. Cohen, was "to promote, in the context of 'creative Marxism', the cause of anti-Stalinism and democratic socialist reform inside the political system".

An End to Silence represents a selection, prepared by Professor Cohen and translated by George Saunders, of materials appearing in the journal complete and eleven parts of the journal transmitted to the West by Medvedev. (Other issues were not provided, according to Medvedev, because they contain material which is already well-known. That seems a questionable procedure, and Medvedev, as a professional historian, should have realized that, at the very least, the table of contents of all issues produced in the USSR should have been made available.) Cohen has attempted to do with the *Political Diary* what Peter Reddaway did so well with the underground *Chronicle of Current Events* in his compilation *Uncensored Russia* (1972): to provide a sense of the journal's central themes.

Cohen has sought to accomplish this by dividing the *Diary*'s contents into six sections, entitled "The Crimes of Stalinism", "Guilt and Responsibility", "Neo-Stalinism", "Currents of Soviet Opinion and Dissent", "August of 1956", and "The Winter of Communism".

Characteristically John Cohen continued to read his law books, work at finishing Gibbon, and to read presumably for relaxation, Cicero's *Seneca* (a favourite of his father's). His breakdown can be said to contain the modern belief that children should be spared from the inevitably damaging pressures of explicitly voiced, even parental expectations. Yet this was somehow fated to survive the unreasonable pressures of a career in himself every way of cure. He recovered, however, his faith in repression and its emblem, the diary. And thenceforth the two would never again fall him.

The editors have adopted the long tradition of restraint to the extent of keeping their comments and editorial interpolations to a minimum. As for these first volumes to be republished, second Adams generation achieve the same easy readability as the previous published volumes. Cohen's selections from the first and second generations. The editors usually point out some intellectual parallel between John Quincy and his father; they may have gone on to note what Medvedev was taking up subjects, would prove to be of importance in later life. They might also have indicated where an extract of Adams would have displayed signs of Adams's leap into maturity at about the age of eighteen - something they discuss in their introduction.

Finally, in view of the decade that must pass before the poetry of John Quincy Adams sees print, it would have been convenient to have an appendix containing "An Epistle to Delia", his poem about "Miss Nancy Hazen" - Evelyne, John Quincy expressed the aspirations of his own diary when he wrote that other women were carried away by Medvedev's charms.

But I, whom neither Love nor Fame seek the enduring beauty of the poem.

Reform", and "Toward a Moscow Spring?".

Obviously, the task of boiling down some three thousand pages of typescript into a book of slightly over three hundred pages is not a simple one, yet, on balance, Cohen has done a commendable job. Since nineteen of the forty-one issues he uses have appeared in the West in Russian-language editions, one can gain a sense of his method of selection. The only area where I might seriously fault Cohen is in his decision to exclude certain material, such as a segment of the (and interesting) review of Andrei Amalrik's *Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?*, which point to the journal's disagreement with Western-style liberals. This omission creates the misleading impression that Medvedev and his associates contest only the views of conservative "neo-Stalinists" and "neo-Slavophiles". In point of fact, they are just as opposed to the liberals' insistence on immediate and sweeping political change.

My other criticisms of Cohen's selection are relatively minor. Had I been editor, I might have accorded more space to material bearing on the volatile nationalities question, and, since the *Diary* served as a source of news (and even of gossip) about the shifting fortunes of Party leaders, it might have been appropriate to include some examples of this genre. For example, the fascinating account of the removal of Semichastny as head of the KGB and his replacement by Andropov, or the report on the assignment of Leningrad Party boss Tolstikov to the post of ambassador to Red China.

How important a publication was *Political Diary*? Clearly, a samizdat journal limited to five copies (which were circulated among its forty-five readers) can have only the most narrow dissemination. The journal was, by choice and design, an elitist organ. Still, certain of its contributors - for self-evident reasons, Medvedev is unable to name most of them - appear to have been individuals of influence: Academician Semichastny was, at least until 1968, a regular reader (though in the 1970s he moved to Moscow); Medvedev's neo-Marxist positions, and Aleksandr Tvardovsky, the editor of *Novy mir*, an irregular one. The list

might have done better to leave out Esenin's prose, which is not crucial to the biography and whose main claim to inclusion seems to be that it is previously untranslated.

The essays are anyway marred by often unacknowledged omissions (including the censored beginning of *Iron Mirgorod*, Esenin's response to his American visit, an obvious candidate for re-statement), lack of background material and translations that are clumsy or just plain wrong. One of the more ludicrous is an extremely long line of these has the poet suggesting, in *Iron Mirgorod*, that in Russia they still believe not in God the father but in "grandfathers with beards". And though, perversely, *The Keys of Mary* is supplied with notes that are actually explanatory, these are insufficient, arbitrary, and on occasion casually misleading.

The survey of Esenin's life through the memoirs of his contemporaries is the most successful section of the book. Judicious selection has given us some fascinating material, particularly among the posthumous assessments, and since the subject is constantly Esenin himself the lack of a proper apparatus is less disabling. Yet here too Dr Davies could have been more informative. Thus Mayakovsky's famous discussion in "How Veres is Made" of his poem on Esenin's suicide is quoted at length. Surely, however, the main historical significance of Mayakovsky's "attack" - his attempt "to make Esenin's and uninteresting" - is that less than five years later he was following Esenin's example. Dr Davies does not find this worthy of note, but Tsvetaeva, who by a further twist of fate would herself die by her own hand in 1941, did. The main poem in her August 1930 "Savile cycle", *Mayakovsky*, is a posthumous reconciled conversation between the two poets.

Dr Davies to offer this biography in the form of memoirs, letters and documents as "an approach to the reconstruction of Esenin to the English-speaking reader". The volume contains three essays by Esenin, the first, "Declaration", extracts from his correspondence, twenty pages of photographs, and his main section, "Contemporaries", through the eyes of his contemporaries. There is no index, and no diary as mentioned in the text. Dr Davies regrets in her introduction that she had hoped to include, she

of contributors includes high-ranking Party officials, for example Yevgeny Frolov, who was for a time on the editorial staff of *Kommunist*, and Len Karpinsky, who served, until his departure from *Pravda*, an important aim of *Political Diary* was to influence the minds and sensibilities of those in a position to help bring about significant political, economic and social reform. It would be incorrect to consider the journal a "dissident" publication; rather, it sought to serve the interests of a segment of the "left-liberal" wing of the Party-state intelligentsia.

A central concern, even obsession, of the *Diary* is anti-Stalinism, and Cohen has appropriately prefaced the volume with a well-researched essay on "The Stalin Question Since Stalin". For Medvedev and his colleagues, Stalin's reign represented a ghastly aberration separating two periods of creative ferment - the 1920s and the Khrushchev "thaw". Time and again, the *Diary* reminds its readers of the "mountain of crimes" perpetrated by Stalin, especially against those who were members of the Party (including Medvedev's father, a victim of the purges). The Brezhnev period is seen as one characterized by lurches in the neo-Stalinist direction which have served to brake, but which cannot ultimately halt the USSR's progress toward a "Moscow Spring" (the suppression of the Dubcek leadership in Czechoslovakia is viewed as a particularly heavy blow by the *Diary*'s contributors).

Medvedev and his colleagues are almost startlingly optimistic, believing that in the future "objective" reasons for hope in the USSR's technical and scientific revolution... Medvedev writes, "will bring about changes in the social structure and in its economic base that will prove incompatible with the system of unlimited rule by a single individual (or by a small group)". He notes in a similar vein that advances in communication technology will soon make it impossible for the USSR to obstruct the flow of information from other countries. The Brezhnev régime has, of course, attempted to avoid this by purchasing (and, if need be, pilfering) the advanced technology which its unwieldy system has been unable to provide; as for the "flow of information," better jammers can always be built, though at great expense, to block or garble transmissions from abroad.

The future, Medvedev and his fellow contributors believe, is already here, producing new men. "The new times", Karpinsky writes, "are percolating into the apparatus and forming a layer of Party intellectuals within it." The tanks which rolled into Prague were an "anachronism". (Perhaps so, but a decade after the appearance of the last issue of *Political Diary*, the anachronism appears to be holding firm. Of course, the Brezhnev succession will provide the ultimate test of Medvedev's and Karpinsky's optimism.)

While time is claimed to be on the side of Medvedev and his associates, retrograde elements are nevertheless perceived to be at work in Soviet society. The most dangerous are the neo-Stalinists such as the editor of *Oktyabr*, Vsevolod Kochetov (now deceased), Sergei Trapeznikov, head of the Party Central Committee's department for science, schools, and higher educational institutions, and General Yefimov, head of the Chief Political Administration of the Soviet Army and Navy. These are the individuals who want to bring back the good old days of 1937. They must be exposed and fought tooth and nail. (It should be noted that some *Diary* contributors, though not Medvedev, have a tendency to exaggerate the strength of this group.)

Neo-Slavophiles (i.e., Russian nationalists), with their romantic, "unscientific" approach to politics and history, and, often, with their religious views as well, are likewise dangerous - some of the *Diary* authors, for example, Raisa Lert, tend to identify neo-Slavophiles and neo-Stalinists - and must be discredited, largely by showing the incompatibility of their ideas with Marxism-Leninism. The presence of this "third pole" (the term is that of critic Feliks Kuznetsov, cited by the

Diary) serves to complicate the simplistic schema, adopted by a number of the journal's contributors, according to which ideological struggle is reduced to a conflict between reformist Marxism and neo-Stalinism. It should be added that in the period since 1971 the strength of this "third pole" has noticeably increased.

How realistic are Medvedev's hopes for a "Moscow Spring"? Certainly he is no "Don Quixote", a term Cohen incongruously applies to him at one point; rather, he is, in the words of one British analyst, "a political animal par excellence". The late Andrei Amalrik, in what was perhaps his most incisive essay, "Ideologies in Soviet Society", addressed himself to the future potential of that "liberal Marxist" tendency represented by Medvedev which, while seeking to inject elements of democracy and pluralism into Soviet society, also wants to preserve the leading role of Marxism and the Communist Party. According to Amalrik, the "social support" (*opora*) of this ideology is "a significant part of the middle class brought up on Marxism, including... many Party functionaries and managers". But it does not have a mass base.

Amalrik thought that the ideology most likely to emerge supreme, particularly in a time of crisis - elicited, say, by food shortages - was "National Bolshevism" or "Neostalinist nationalism", a variety of Russian nationalism enjoying significant support in the Party-state apparatus. Since, however, National Bolshevism, the term goes back to émigré professor Nikolai Ustryalov and the *Smena vekh* movement in the early 1920s - is an ideology with appeal only for ethnic Russians, Amalrik felt that the post-Brezhnev leadership might hesitate to adopt it, fearing the reaction of the minority nationalities who, after all, make up half the population of the USSR. In that case, he believed, the regime would be likely, especially in a time of crisis, to lean in the direction of "liberal Marxism". Once stabilized in power, liberal Marxists would be likely to fall under the influence of "liberal democratic" ideology (i.e., that tendency represented by Amalrik).

Such a scenario is plausible, but it is in need of some modification. There are significant reasons why the next leadership might not choose the path recommended by Medvedev and his associates. First, there is a massive popular indifference to Marxist ideology, obvious to all but purblind observers, which has been proceeding apace in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods. The populace is so unsympathetic to the official ideology that Soviet cultural expression has increasingly treated it as irrelevant. To be sure, a "cold" ideology can still exert a powerful influence, especially when hitched to an immense propaganda and education apparatus.

One must be grateful to Stephen Cohen, and to George Saunders, for providing us with a judiciously chosen and readable selection of materials from an important samizdat publication. And Medvedev himself is to be commended for his organizational skills and dutiful labours. Western specialists on the Soviet Union, whatever their political sympathies, cannot be indifferent to the wealth of material which Medvedev and his associates have amassed.

LORD BYRON
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What a feast of a life actually in process of being lived these letters have provided. They breathe the very spirit of the man, and they bring Byron and his circle of friends before our eyes as no biography has ever done or can ever hope to do. Robert Nye in *The Guardian* £12.50

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THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MAUDIE LITTLE HAMPTON
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Introduction and Text by John Julius Norwich
John Murray edition: £6.95 Penguin paperback edition: £2.50
JOHN MURRAY

Criminal proceedings

T. J. Binyon

GERALD HAMMOND

The Game

169pp. Macmillan. £5.95.
0 333 33113 3

Newton Lauder, gunsmith, Keith Calder, the engaging, amoral hero of Gerald Hammond's previous books, joins forces with an accountant and the madam of an up-market brothel to investigate the suspected killing of one of the house's clients. Antique gun lore is as interesting, and the fight as rough as ever, but the whole is slightly less satisfying than before, when Calder used to take on the rest of the world without any assistance. And he is now so respectable that he's never going to poach again?

TONY HILLERMAN

People of Darkness

202pp. Gollancz. £6.95.
0 575 03133 6

Jim Chee, sergeant in the Navajo Tribal Police, is called in to investigate a minor burglary at the home of the local millionaire, B. J. Vines, whose money comes from uranium mining. The investigation takes Chee back to a mining disaster of the 1950s, and involves him with a pretty young Anglo schoolteacher and with an albino contract killer who is looking for his lost mother. Each rift is loaded with tribal lore – the dust-jacket reports that the author's thrillers are used to teach schoolchildren ethnography in the United States – perhaps overloaded, indeed, but the book is well put together and is worth several strings of anyone's wampum.

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CHRIS MULLIN

A Very British Coup

220pp. Hodder and Stoughton. £6.95.
0 340 28586 9

Chris Mullin, editor of *Tribune* and a leading member of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, has written not so much a novel as a political strip cartoon. Its plot is a good example of that manic depressiveness (swinging without intermediate stages, from optimistic fantasy to pessimistic paranoia) which is perhaps characteristic of all political idealism. It opens on the upswing: in the general election of March 1981 the great British public stoutheartedly defies the predictions of pundits and opinion polls to give the Labour party, led by left-winger Albert Perkins, a landslide victory. Euphoria is, however, immediately succeeded by misery: the forces of reaction – Civil Service, Church, Army and US government – band together to emasculate the government's policies and to replace Perkins by a more labile leader. Some amusing scenes of the ruling classes relaxing in the Athenaeum and Annabel's don't, in the end, make up for a general lack of thrills and excitement.

NGAIO MARSH

Light Thickets

251pp. Collins. £7.50.
0 00 231477 0

Ngaio Marsh died earlier this year at the age of eighty two. Her last novel, now posthumously published, returns to the scene of an earlier book: the Dolphin Theatre on the South Bank. In *Death at the Dolphin*, written in 1967, a murder took place when the theatre was re-opened. Now, twenty years later, Peregrine Jay is still the director, and his production of *Macbeth* ends with an extra, unscheduled death. Which is, of course, investigated by Chief Superintendent Roderick Allyn and his henchmen: Inspector Fox and Sergeant Thompson and Bailey. This is not one of Ngaio Marsh's better books: most of it is devoted to the description of what the author sees as an ideal production of *Macbeth*; the murder occurs later in the book. Allyn and Fox are slow getting to work, and even slower to realize that the theory they are propounding is obviously impossible. Nevertheless, one is grateful to have the opportunity to bid an affectionate farewell to them and to their creator; and there are still occasional touches to remind us why she was by no means the junior member of that formidable female quartet which ruled English detective fiction for so long.

S. T. HAYMON

Ritual Murder

237pp. Constable. £6.95.
0 09 446460 6

Murder of chorister in an East Anglian cathedral re-enacts child murder which took place in the town eight hundred years earlier. Now, as then, the crime is blamed on the Jews, and used as excuse for antisemitic attacks and riots. S. T. Haymon's second crime novel is a definite advance on her first, *Death and the Pregnant Virgin*, good though that was. The cast list is perhaps a trifle overworked, but otherwise the author doesn't put a foot wrong, as her Detective-Inspector Jurnet carefully disentangles a number of interconnected threads. Solidly put together and elegantly written, at the same time it achieves – without pomposity – a degree of seriousness beyond most examples of the genre.

JOHN SHERWOOD

A Shot in the Arm

172pp. Gollancz. £6.95.
0 575 03197 2

It is 1937; the BBC, under Sir John Rath, is as prudent as a Victorian spinster. Possible scandals must be concealed, quarrels damped down; but nothing can conceal the fact that Lavonia Manners, a secretary with a very dubious past, has been shot through the head as she bent over a desk in a Broadcasting House office, the bullet coming from a 475 sporting rifle fired from the Langham Hotel opposite John Sherwood's always

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original and ingenious, and these two qualities are very much in evidence in his latest book. A good deal of research must have gone into it, too, to produce not only a convincing period atmosphere, but also an even more convincing institutional one.

PETER INCHBALD

The Sweet Short Grass

182pp. Collins. £6.50.
0 00 231792 3

Detective Chief Inspector Franco Corti of the Yard's Art and Antiques Squad – and hero of Peter Inchbald's very good first novel, *Tondo for Short* – has decided to give up his Italian origins. He changes his name to Frank Short, moves out of Soho, and takes out a mortgage on a house in Acton. But the intrigue he becomes involved in turns out to be very much a family affair, and the Italian blood swims to the surface. Narration slightly blitty, but scenes and characters without exception excellent, and a good, strong flavour to the whole.

MAGDALEN NABB

Death of a Dutchman

216pp. Collins. £6.75.
0 00 231327 8

MagdaLEN Nabb's second novel, like her excellent *Death of an Englishman*, is set in Florence. Marshal Guarnaccia, troubled by the weather, tourists and terrorists, doggedly investigates the death of a Dutch jeweller, refusing to believe – unlike his superiors – that he is dealing with a suicide. Credible, human and interesting characters move through a carefully worked out plot which reaches back into family history, the whole being set against a thick, textured Florentine background.

CATHERINE AIRD

Last Resorts

189pp. Collins. £6.50.
0 00 231410 X

A local fisherman discovers a body floating in the estuary of the river Cullie; according to the pathologist death is not due to natural causes, and the case is given to Detective-Inspector C. D. Sloan, assisted by Detective-Constable Crosby. Another of Catherine Aird's Cheshire novels is always welcome, and the latest maintains the usual high standard: carefully and originally plotted, it is also elegantly and amusingly written. Perhaps the author's style is becoming slightly mannered, but only enough to give the book a distinctly individual flavour.

JOHN D. MACDONALD

Cinnamon Skin

275pp. Collins. £7.50.
0 00 222651 0

The twentieth adventure of Travis McGee, self-styled salvage expert and Florida beach bum extraordinaire, has Travis and his friend, economist Meyer, tracking down the villain who put a bomb aboard Meyer's cruiser, the *John Maynard Keynes*. *Cinnamon Skin* is as solidly professional and as exciting as any of the preceding nineteen novels, and it's a wise move on the part of the author to leave McGee up permanently with Meyer. But isn't the plot just a tiny bit reminiscent of one which came up six books ago, in *The Turquoise Lament*?

I. I. MAGDALEN

The Search for Anderson

224pp. World's Work. £6.95.
0 437 09290 3

British intelligence officer Derek Flaye, searching for a possible defector and a gold mine of information, follows a series of clues set down by his former mentor Major William Hazlegrave, prep-school master and trainer of agents. Complicated and subtle – overly so, perhaps – and very reminiscent, on a smaller scale, of later Le Carré.

DEREK LAMBERT

The Red Dove

274pp. Hamish Hamilton. £7.95.
0 241 10867 5

In this novel, set a short way into the future, American intelligence enlisted the services of a drop-out US

astronaut, now a beach-bum, in a grandiose scheme to suborn a Russian cosmonaut and, with his help, to hijack a Soviet space shuttle. A rapid and fluent narrative is sustained by several megabytes of technical detail. Characters are more obviously synthetic, but not off-puttingly so.

ELIZABETH FERRARS

Skeleton in Search of a Cupboard

181pp. Collins. £6.50.
0 00 231925 X

Henrietta Cosgrove's eightieth birthday is celebrated by a family party at her beautiful old thatched house: a party that goes rather too well, for the house is set on fire that evening, and Henrietta only just escapes with her life. An interesting collection of characters, well portrayed through the observant gaze of narrator Freda, married to Henrietta's detective novelist stepson. The family tensions ring true, and the plot which exposes them is neatly conceived.

MARIAN BARSON

Death Beside the Seaside

177pp. Collins. £6.50.
0 00 231039 2

Narrator Trudi Kane plays the piano in a smart bar overlooking the pier at a south coast resort; she lives in a theatrical boarding-house, and is plagued by a fellow lodger's delinquent son – until he disappears. Good sinister atmosphere and a pleasing collection of eccentrics dredged from the lower reaches of showbiz life.

BARBARA PAUL

Your Eyelids Are Growing Heavy

211pp. Collins. £6.75.
0 00 231689 7

Megan Phillips, distribution manager of Glickman Pharmaceuticals, wakes up on the fourteenth fairway of a Pittsburgh golf-course to discover that she's lost thirty-eight hours out of her life. A local fisherman discovers a body floating in the estuary of the river Cullie; according to the pathologist death is not due to natural causes, and the case is given to Detective-Inspector C. D. Sloan, assisted by Detective-Constable Crosby. Another of Catherine Aird's Cheshire novels is always welcome, and the latest maintains the usual high standard: carefully and originally plotted, it is also elegantly and amusingly written. Perhaps the author's style is becoming slightly mannered, but only enough to give the book a distinctly individual flavour.

GLADYS MITCHELL

Death of a Burrowing Mole

204pp. Michael Joseph. £6.95.
0 7181 2158 9

Two undergraduates visit Holdy Castle to look for buried treasure. To their dismay, the site is swarming with other diggers: archaeologists are excavating a Bronze Age barrow, architects reconstructing the castle walls. Competition is fierce, quarrels abound, and sudden death intervenes. Since the godmother of one undergraduate is Dame Beatrice Lestrangle Bradley, it is not long before her formidable presence is making itself felt, while her equally formidable mind unravels the mystery. Another completely individual, instantly recognizable and highly enjoyable Gladys Mitchell novel.

S. F. X. DEAN

By Frequent Anguish

253pp. Collins. £6.95.
0 00 231031 7

Nell Kelly, middle-aged professor of English at a New England college, is agonizing over whether he can marry Friedella Lacey – beautiful, half his age, his god-daughter and his supervisor – when his problem is brutally solved by someone who bashes in her head with a golden dumb-bell. Excellent setting. Old Hampton College is solidly conceived and furnished with some pleasing traditions – eccentric characters and well thought out plot add to a good debut.

ANDREW TAYLOR

Caroline Minicula

184pp. Gollancz. £6.95.
0 575 03142 5

Graduate palaeographer William Douglas and his beautiful girl-friend Amanda are enlisted in a criminal treasure hunt with a palaeographic first clue. Later clues send them scuttling round East Angles, hotly pursued by sinister killers. Andrew Taylor's first

novel is perhaps less than credible, by only because of the bizarreness of the plot, but also because of the complex, amoral of all its characters. But it is, light, lively and entertaining as well.

PETER WHALLEY

Post Mortem

109pp. Macmillan. £6.95.
0 333 33572 4

Computer programmer Alan is tired of living in Leeds with his dull wife, Eileen. He works out an ingenious method of murdering her which, at the same time, causes the maximum amount of discomfort to his closest friends. Telling the story from the murderer's point of view is difficult to manage satisfactorily, but Peter Whalley brings it off neatly in his first novel, succeeding, at the same time, in making it genuinely comic.

JONATHAN VALIN

Dead Letter

224pp. Collins. £6.75.
0 00 231328 6

Cincinnati private eye Harry Stone, hero of Jonathan Valin's two previous books, is hired by Professor Day Lovingside to retrieve secret papers – information on a nuclear reactor – which have been stolen by his daughter Sarah, a Marxist and an ecology freak. But as Harry's investigation proceeds the theft recedes into the background to be replaced by a tangled web of human relationships. A solid intelligent work which achieves a nice balance between action and ratiocination.

LUCILLE KALLEN

C. B. Greenfield: No Lady in the House

230pp. Collins. £6.75.
0 00 231690 0

In Lucille Kallen's third C. B. Greenfield novel the *Evening Post* is stirred into action when his newly acquired charlady is murdered and his equal new and even more prized system stolen. With Greenfield making deductions and his usual sleazy and chief reporter Maggie Romé doing the legwork, it's only a matter of time before the villains are brought to book. Neatly conceived and plotted, executed, with some very sharp observed New England domestic interiors.

ROBERT LEIGH

The Girl With the Bright Head

255pp. Macmillan. £6.95.
0 333 33548 1

Private investigator Sam Carroll investigates a seventeen-year-old Charlie Leicester Square one evening, when she is in trouble with the police. He gets her out of this one, only to land himself in another, as she gets involved with her own complications and with a Solovitch, a well-written, with a good though Carroll is a bit too pleased with himself, and Chandlerian colour deafening.

WILLIAM MARSHALL

War Machine

220pp. Hamish Hamilton. £8.95.
0 241 10823 3

The eighth of William Marshall's stories about the Hong Kong poet begins with a spectacular small-scale bombardment of the Yellow Street police station, which appears to be the work of a Japanese detachment, hidden in the colony's unaware that the war ended forty years ago. William Marshall gives himself impossible situations to get out of: his escape from the police force of two years after him; he sits calmly in a room, a schoolboy, having his fair hair dyed black by a passing American beautician.

There is much to relish in this novel, the addict of the undereducated service man, Edward Young's *Passenger* (1963, 215pp, J. M. Dent), and Marshall's (1963, 215pp, J. M. Dent), about a schoolboy Captain in the Royal

Stage-managing murder

Thomas Sutcliffe

P. D. JAMES

The Skull Beneath the Skin

384pp. Faber. £7.95.
0 571 11961 1

In her last novel, *Innocent Blood*, P. D. James made some rather serious errors for an established writer of murder mysteries. To start with, her characters were psychologically credible: they had motives for what they did and said rather than just for murder, and their mental life was both complicated and unresolved. The setting for the novel was a recognizable location, in which the extraordinary had to be conveyed against the pressure of the ordinary and familiar. Strictly speaking there was no murder and the central theme of inherited guilt and revenge was properly regarded as having no ready solution. Most serious of all, perhaps, the novel was clearly sceptical about the idea of conclusive blame. This was not the sort of thing for which P. D. James had been appointed Queen of Crime.

Crime in paperback

Patricia Craig

Announcing the old crime-puzzle dead at 1930, Anthony Berkeley nominated as his successor a new type of detective story, "the novel with a detective or crime interest, holding its readers less by mathematical than by psychological interest." To show the type of thing he had in mind he quickly wrote two novels, *Make-Aforethought* (1931) and *Before the Fact* (1932); now reissued in Jill Norman and Hobhouse's "Crime Classics" series. 310pp. £1.75.

Applying the break with the frivolous made his detective fiction had crystallized in the 1920s by adopting the style of Francis Iles. In both these novels the conventional detecting process is replaced by a straightforward account of the crime: the first from the murderer's point of view and the second from the victim's. Each of Iles's criminals is a husband anxious to do away with his wife. In *Before the Fact* the villain relies on his own sense of manner to see him through; in *Make-Aforethought* he is corrupted gradually by prolonged contact with wrongdoing, and remains enthralled and is guilty, at the very least, of criminal inaction. To some extent the connives at her own death. The novel is a study in moralization; it also shows, as Iles intended, that obfuscation isn't essential to suspense.

With these books Francis Iles extended the range of the crime novel, but he failed to make the "old crime puzzle" redundant; at its best, however, this genre excluded the kind of mechanical characterization he employed. Cyril Hare's *Tenants for Death* (1937, 200pp, Jill Norman and Hobhouse, £1.75), an entertaining tale of impersonation and revenge, comes into this category, although being diminished by it; it is both dexterous and entertaining. *House of Darkness*, by Allan Macdonald (1947) is another "crime classic" (256pp, J. M. Dent, £1.75). At this time, an engaging detective story very much in the manner of Agatha Christie's central character, Colin Ogilvie, true to the tradition of the indestructible hero, Ogilvie's agility and insouciance to a remarkable degree. He is avid in the region, merely leaving behind him a trail of incapacitated thugs. Tight spots nothing to Colin Ogilvie: at one point, with the police force of two years after him, he sits calmly in a room, a schoolboy, having his fair hair dyed black by a passing American beautician.

There is much to relish in this novel, the addict of the undereducated service man, Edward Young's *Passenger* (1963, 215pp, J. M. Dent), and Marshall's (1963, 215pp, J. M. Dent), about a schoolboy Captain in the Royal

Some, but not all, of these problems have been overcome in *The Skull Beneath the Skin*. As though to reassure readers unnerved by that last dereliction, James has produced a lavish version of a classic country-house murder mystery, crowded with well-researched props and creaking but much-loved stage machinery. Those dismayed by *Innocent Blood* should not be worried by the epigraph from Eliot's "Whispers of Immortality". This is a literary thriller, so all the characters have a talent for vulgar quotation. (Even Inspector Grogan, a something of a social outcast in this company, can turn up Voltaire in the original when circumstances look particularly grim.) The Eliot falls into the same category, a family name dropping by a poor relation. But though all the details are rendered with affection and accuracy and no ingreant is missing there is a feeling that James has become a little uncertain about the form. The trick still works triumphantly, but the pattern is uneasy and even, perhaps, a bit doubtful that the routine is worth pursuing.

"This is a story-book killing," says one of the characters half-way through the book, "A close circle of suspects, isolated scene-of-crime conveniently

cut off from the mainland, known *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem*. It should be perfectly possible to tie it up – that's the jargon isn't it – within a week." In other words we shouldn't imagine that James is taking herself too seriously.

Clarissa Lyle, an actress fading slowly into provincial rep, has been receiving poison-pen letters consisting of funeral extracts from Jacobean tragedies. She is shortly to take part in an amateur production of *The Duchess of Malfi*, to be performed in a refurbished Victorian theatre on a private island off the coast of Dorset. The island is well equipped with a bloodstained reputation, secret tunnels and a flooded cave. A small house party, most of whom have reasons for bludgeoning her to death, gather to watch the performance. Cordelia Gray, James's appealingly doubtful private eye, has been hired by Sir George Ralston to protect his wife and discover the source of the letters. Cordelia's great charm as a character is that she fails to do any better than most readers would in the same position.

She is anxiously aware of her own shortcomings, often disabled by sympathy for the objects of the

investigation, and deeply confused by the relation between what she does for a living, and justice. She recalls her only previous experience involving humans (her small agency is financed principally by the recovery of lost pets) with a mixture of fascination and shame. She is oppressed throughout this book by a brooding sense of disaster, but the reader, abandoned her at exactly those moments when she most needs it. When she enters the room in which the body of her charge is lying we are told "For some reason which she was never able afterwards to understand she felt no premonition, no unease." She has a gratifying ability to discover the truth just too late to save anyone, but early enough, and in the right circumstances, to place herself in mortal danger. She is in fact correct in thinking that she is somehow in the wrong place, that she is "caught in a charade in which she stumbled into a blindfold... in which an unknown intelligence watched, waited and directed the play." In this knowingly constructed parlour game she is an intrusion from a mainland of credibility.

The other characters, such as Ambrose Gorrings, the owner of the

ill-omened Courcy Castle, Ivo Whittingham, a cancerous theatre critic reviewing his last performance, and Roma Lisle, a penniless cousin of the corpse, are all presented to us as having some emotional depth but carry with them the sense that they are animated components of a puzzle, studiously varied in their appearance so that we can readily tell them apart when looking for a solution.

The style too shifts uneasily between knowledgeable parody and sincerity of description which undermine each other. Much of the action is narrated in a Lustgarten prose, full of ominous terminations and dark collusive hints to the reader. It is as much a collector's item as the Gothic Victorian novel which fills Gorrings's castle, but it is combined here with a different voice, James's own, a simple clarity used to describe Cordelia's emotions and doubts. The combination gives rise to a degree of uncertainty about whether the novel is meant to be a bit of fun, risibly slavish in its adherence to the forms, or whether it is expected to carry some substantial reflection on morality and retribution.

James places her clues scrupulously, and the solution is satisfyingly surprising without being outrageous, but there are too many moments when the novel goes beyond the limits of country house crime, including lines which aren't decorous enough to take part in the playful narrative of an action without feeling. Good writing and genre literature don't mix particularly well, perhaps because one of the qualities of good writing, an honesty about the complexity of events and people, is just an irritating delay to the satisfactions of crime fiction. *The Skull Beneath the Skin* contains the resolution required by the genre and the irresolution of a better book, but it proves, I think, that the ambition to write well and the ambition to write a conventional thriller can't both be fulfilled at once.



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Thinking up reality

David Papineau

PAUL K. FEYERABEND

Philosophical Papers: Volume 1, Realism, Rationalism, and Scientific Truth. Volume 2, Problems of Empiricism

353pp and 255pp. Cambridge University Press. £22.50 and £17.50. 0 521 22897 2 and 0 521 23564 8

In 1962 Paul Feyerabend's article "Explanation, Reduction and Empiricism" appeared in *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. III. If philosophy had overnight sensations, this would have been one. A senior colleague of mine still recalls how he hurried round the department drawing attention to the article, as one might to news of some major public disaster. This was the same year as T. S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Between them the philosopher Feyerabend and the historian Kuhn turned academic thinking about science upside down. Until then the philosophy of science had been a pretty dull affair. With few exceptions it had pictured science as accumulating truth through observation and experimental discovery. There was, it is true, some debate about the status of theoretical hypotheses (about gravitational forces, say, or sub-atomic particles) which went beyond what observation guaranteed. But whatever their exact status, it was generally agreed that such theories played an essentially secondary role, somehow tidying up after the serious business of uncovering empirical facts was done.

For Kuhn and Feyerabend scientific facts were made, not discovered. As they had it, the course of science was directed far more by the autonomous creation of speculative theories than by new experimental results. Indeed they questioned the very idea of objective "experimental results" existing independently of their changing theoretical surroundings. Thus, for example, even everyday observations of moving bodies were argued to depend for their meanings on variable assumptions about the causes of motion and the structure of space and time.

Of course the apparent implication, that even scientific truth was in the end just a matter of opinion, seemed somewhat absurd. But it was difficult to ignore the awkward questions that Kuhn and Feyerabend raised about the orthodox picture of science. For one thing, their apparently extreme view about observation could call on some respectable philosophical support. The rejection of the "given", of the idea that sensory awareness gives us unimpeachable access to the data, binds together a surprising number of contemporary philosophical schools: it joins the British linguistic tradition of Wittgenstein, Quine and Austin to the American neo-pragmatism of Quine and Sellars, and there are similar ideas in French structuralism and post-structuralism. It is true that the specific thesis of the "theory-dependence of observation" adds something to this general philosophical theme. But the links are close, and indeed the first piece reprinted in these *Philosophical Papers* is a slightly obscure early article in which Feyerabend argues explicitly from a version of Wittgenstein's private language argument to the conclusion that it is only in the context of a surrounding theory (as in Wittgenstein's "language-games") that observation reports have meaning.

However, doubts about the authority of observation were only a part of Kuhn and Feyerabend's radicalism. Most philosophers, both inside and outside the philosophy of science, originally saw such doubts as merely of specialist interest. After all, did not the example of modern sciences show that it must somehow be possible to build up objective knowledge of how things are, however exactly the trick was done? What Feyerabend and Kuhn added in the early 1960s was the historical claim that, far from displaying a steady accumulation of knowledge, modern science kept on changing its mind. And this was not just a matter of philosophers correcting old ones, but of radical

subverting them, of completely changing the conceptual spectacles through which the world is viewed. The idea of such conceptual ruptures was familiar from other areas of thought: what was surprising was the claim that the same thing happened within the history of even such hard sciences as physics, chemistry and astronomy.

Kuhn and Feyerabend drew rather different morals from this conceptual variability. Kuhn introduced the now hackneyed term "paradigm" to convey the way certain patterns of thought would hold sway for extended periods in any given area, until their replacement in a brief, traumatic "revolution". Feyerabend on the other hand saw science as permanent revolution. Even if scientists in practice sometimes lapsed into Kuhnian conservatism, there was always a role for the proliferation of alternative conceptual approaches.

But these differences about the frequency of change were of little significance beside their underlying agreement on the fact of conceptual variability. For this agreement meant it was no longer possible to view the theory-dependence of observation as merely of local interest. If observation depended on theory, and if theories retained no part of preceding views, then there seemed no avoiding the conclusion that each theory made its own world, and the choices between them were ultimately arbitrary. As Kuhn and Feyerabend independently came to describe it, competing theories in science were *incommensurable*, for lack of any common basis against which they might be evaluated.

Over the past two decades the philosophical reputations of Kuhn and Feyerabend have undergone a curious reversal. Originally Feyerabend was taken rather more seriously. Nobody liked his conclusions very much. But it

was allowed that he did serious philosophical work along his way to reaching them. Kuhn, by contrast, seemed a philosophical lightweight. Whatever his merits as a historian, he tended to overreach himself when articulating his epistemological views, and could appear naive when defending them. But recently Feyerabend's philosophical star has waned. And at the same time, and without any noticeable period of re-evaluation, reputable philosophical commentators have taken to referring to Kuhn as one of the major thinkers of the twentieth century.

Part of the reason for this is that Kuhn has become far more circumspect in his philosophical pronouncements. He now avoids the more tendentious of his earlier claims, and indeed is prepared to allow that there might perhaps be agreed standards with respect to which science can be seen as progressing. Feyerabend, on the other hand, has been moving with increasing speed in the opposite direction. Much of his recent work has been devoted to disproving precisely what Kuhn has been prepared to concede. He has attacked all attempts (most notably those of Imre Lakatos) to articulate principles of rationality which might accommodate the discontinuity of scientific theorizing. Feyerabend now advocates not only the proliferation of theories, but also the proliferation of methodological standards. In his view the history of even our modern Western scientific tradition displays no particular methodological pattern - different scientists have upheld different methodological principles, and some have upheld none at all. And from this he argues that Western science is just one tradition amongst many, with no special claim to authority. As to the supposed technological advances of Western

science, Feyerabend instances such alternative technologies as acupuncture and shamanism, and, for good measure, asks why technological efficacy should be so important anyway. These views go a long way beyond his earlier ones. They have won him some new friends (his last two works were both published by New Left Books), but academic critics have not surprisingly been quite unsympathetic.

Most of these *Philosophical Papers* are more than ten years old, and even the more recent ones have been selected for philosophical substance rather than intensity of debate. And there is some new material, in the form of introductory remarks at various points, which goes some way towards showing why Feyerabend is not simply the pious he has so often seemed to be.

Of particular interest are his remarks on realism, a subject on which he has for some time had little explicit to say. Back in the 1960s realism was to do with the status of the unobservable entities postulated by scientific theories. On this question Feyerabend's views favoured realism, if only because of his downgrading of observables. But now that the battle is over, the question is whether *anything* has properties objectively "out there", independently of the way they are shifted. Little as we may like it, Feyerabend is in the driving-seat. He has actually done the historical work to show that same men with good ideas both within Western science and without, have held all kinds of different intellectual values. As Feyerabend, simply gesturing in the direction of some supposed common intellectual commitment is no longer going to hold relativism at bay. Indeed Feyerabend has made it very difficult to see how we can continue believing the one true theoretical way.

were once true, but have now ceased to be so.

This might just seem like silliness from Feyerabend. But let his epistemological anarchism make a little more sense when set in the general context of doubt about how we have seen such figures as Karl Popper and Richard Rorty argue directly that rejection of the notion "the given" means the abandonment of realism: if we never have direct access to anything, there is no point at all in an absolute reality that gets lost in the story. But while thus conceding that reality is in some sense constituted by our intellectual investigations, rather than providing an independent target for them, these writers would prefer to avoid Feyerabend's relativism. Instead they offer the suggestion that truth in intellectual activity are values which will eventually channel different theoretical approaches in a common direction.

The importance of Feyerabend's that he shows this easy way out cannot be taken for granted. As long as we are at the back of our minds the idea of independent reality to pull through, the right direction, Feyerabend's insistence on the inherent diversity of possible standards seems merely provocative. But without this diversity, the onus of argument is shifted. Little as we may like it, Feyerabend is in the driving-seat. He has actually done the historical work to show that same men with good ideas both within Western science and without, have held all kinds of different intellectual values. As Feyerabend, simply gesturing in the direction of some supposed common intellectual commitment is no longer going to hold relativism at bay. Indeed Feyerabend has made it very difficult to see how we can continue believing the one true theoretical way.

The Marcher mentality

Gwyn Jones

ROBERT BARTLETT

March of Wales 1146-1223
266pp. Oxford University Press.
£19.50.
0 19 821892 3

Robert Bartlett has written a close-packed, well-documented explanatory book about one of our more abundantly self-documenting and self-explanatory men, who happens to be one of the best Latin historians of the twelfth century and one of its most readable writers of prose: Gerald of Wales, or Gerald the Welshman, and still more to most Welshmen Gerald the Welshman. It is not the comprehensive "life and works" we have long been waiting, but whoever writes this work will be glad to have it. *Gerald of Wales* began life as a book arranged under three heads and subdivided into seven chapters: Part I, Politics and Nationality (1, "Gerald the Ecclesiastic"; 2, "Kings"; 3, "The Natural and Supernatural"; 4, "Miracles and Marvels"; 5, "Natural Science"); Part II, Geography (6, "The Face of the Earth"); 7, "Gerald's Ethnographic Achievement". It is published as an Oxford Historical Monograph.

Gerald was born, probably in 1146, at Maesbury in Pembrokeshire, in a

place he described in choice Latin as the most delectable in Wales. He was born of mixed Norman and Welsh blood in troublous times when Welsh princes and Marcher barons were forever fighting, feuding, scheming, and not infrequently intermarrying, with the Angevin kings of England distrustful and jealous in the background. He was the third son of William de Barri and Angharad, daughter of Rhys ap Iwerch, a Welsh princess whose beauty and charm, plus a somewhat rabelaisian abduction and a selection of high-born extra-marital fathers for her children (her lovers included King Henry I of England) earned her the title of "the Helen of Wales." Gerald was thus a young man with everything to hope for and a good deal to expect. He settled for an ecclesiastical career so early, he tells us, that while his brothers were building sand-castles he was building sand-churches. Between 1162 and the late 1170s he spent long periods at the University of Paris, perfecting himself in theology, law and the classics, and whetting his zeal for church reform.

In 1175 his uncle David FitzGerald, Bishop of St David's and another of the "brood of Nest", appointed him Archdeacon of Brecon, whose aged incumbent had been removed for keeping a concubine. Gerald's foot was now on the ladder of success, and after the Bishop's death the following year it must have seemed that all he had to do was keep on climbing. He was promptly disillusioned. His restless

activity and reiterated assaults upon what he called ecclesiastical crimes but weaker men thought reasonable accommodations were upsetting a lot of people; and the king and the Archbishop of Canterbury had no wish whatever to elevate this disputatious, vain, touchy, energetic, and potentially dangerous young man to this of all seats. The election went to Peter de Leia, Prior of Wenlock, a setback which was to prove decisive for Gerald's entire career.

For a full demonstration of this we must look forward some twenty or more years to 1198-1203, when the see of St David's once more fell vacant and Gerald committed himself with all his being to a renewed candidature. In the short run he had grounds for hope, for the local chapter was induced to elect him. But he still had to get past the English king, now King John, whom long ago he had accompanied as a kind of tutor to Ireland, and Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury, to say nothing of the Papacy itself. By now Gerald had a lot of black marks chalked up against him. He had long been a pertinacious critic of the Angevins, especially as part of his campaign to justify and glorify his Marcher kinsmen. "O family, O race!" he had declaimed in the *Expugnatio Hibernica*, "Capable of the conduct of any kingdom by yourself alone, I envy jealous of such vigour, had not descended from on high... O, if I had found a prince who weighed the merit of their great efforts justly...". Or one of those long-echoing prophetic sentences that Gerald the rhetorician

had at command: "What can we expect? Should we hope for any help from our own race? We are in the grip of a law that just as we are Englishmen to the Irish, so we are Irish to the English." As for his Welshness, his British pride, arbitrarily acquired, fervently exploited, and brisily discarded - nothing could be more guaranteed to earn him both royal and archiepiscopal disfavour. For what a lot they were, these Welsh: wild, violent, rebellious in their own country, given to wife-swapping, perjury, poetry, and the habit of finishing their choruses together on a flat. No prospects there, quite apart from the added pill of an overweening national pride.

For Gerald was now shifting the emphasis of his election by insisting that St David's was not just one more bishopric on a far western strand, but a metropolitan see, no less, and therefore independent of Canterbury. Its bishop should be recognized as not just a bishop, but an Archbishop, and above and beyond that a Primate. Outwitted and denied at home, he thrice carried his case to Rome, and thrice failed to establish it with Pope Innocent III. Till now Gerald had been on the whole anti-Welsh. He had served as the king's man to help pacify the country and keep Welsh armies out of England's cherished soil. His suggestions for exterminating the Welsh and abandoning their territories to nature and wild beasts were a piece of Swift's *Madness Proposal*, without the irony. And though for literary and historical reasons posterity

must be profoundly grateful that Gerald accompanied Archbishop Baldwin on his Welsh itinerary of 1188, in so doing he lent support to Baldwin's assertion of the authority of Canterbury over Wales - and St David's.

But now the wicked English were thwarting the rights and interests of Wales and Gerald together. What more natural, more human, more typical of Gerald than to espouse, confuse, and so identify the nation's cause with his? It made no difference to the holders of power. By 1203 he was seeking a face-saving formula or two, accepted defeat and a modest pension, and left the arena. He would go on writing, in large measure about himself and his affairs, private and public, till his death c. 1223.

Dr Bartlett's biographical rather than biographical approach to his subject, together with his detailed characterization of Gerald's ideas, attitudes and intellectual milieu, can leave no one in doubt that there is an intriguing man (no pun is intended) and an author of considerable skill, eloquence and diversity. A chapter like "The Face of the Barbarian" which explores Gerald's views on race, peoples, the ordering of society, warfare, livelihoods, language and the like, shows how wide his world of knowledge and speculation was. The more immanent world of "Kings" shows his principles and prejudices in lively display. *Gerald of Wales* is a useful contribution to the history of ideas at a particular time and in respect of a remarkable man.

Getting to know the self

Flint Schier

KARL AMERIKS

Kant's Theory of Mind: An Analysis of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason
314pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press. £15.
0 19 824661 7

Karl Ameriks, in his splendid book, has carefully and carefully argued that Kant did not burn all his bridges to the realm of things-in-themselves but permitted reason, if not empirical science, an important but exiguous entry. Reason alone can attempt to provide the bridgehead, indeterminate and insecure as it is, but must not deceive itself that it can provide the foundation for a possible science either of rational theology or rational psychology.

Ameriks's special concern in this book is Kant's treatment in his first *Critique* of "rational psychology", which attempts to argue from features of experience to determine conclusions about the nature of the soul, conclusions such as that the soul is simple, is a substance (in the sense of something unconditioned by anything else) and so on. Modern interpreters have appropriated some of Kant's arguments in the *Paralogisms* as though they were the prolegomena to some naturalized science of the human mind. But, as Ameriks makes clear, nothing could have been further from Kant's mind than the project of blazing a trail for a scientific conception of the self. Although Kant punctured the pretensions of rationalism as a science of the self, it is clear that he was doubtful that an "authentically empirical psychology" had any better chance of success (though Ameriks is rightly critical of Kant's rather feeble arguments against, for example, the materiality of the phenomenal self). It is true that Kant did not, like Descartes, put the self on an epistemological pedestal, he is very far from putting mind on a par with nature and very far indeed from intimating

that there might be a unified science of nature treating mind from a third-person perspective as just one part of nature.

Kant's view seems rather to have been that the self, both as it is in itself (noumenally) and as it presents itself empirically to itself (phenomenally), has no special science attaching to it and that the empirical self is if anything more elusive than the external world, so far as attempts to gain determinate knowledge of it are concerned. Ameriks suggests that for Kant it is precisely because there is no set of laws governing the inner states of the self as such that the laws of nature, under which we subsume objects empirically external to us, are required for determinate self-consciousness. We can have determinate knowledge of our inner states only because of their intentionality - that is, only because they point to a realm of objects governed by regular laws. Self-knowledge is parasitic on knowledge of nature, but the self is not in nature. Kant has in fact inverted Descartes's reasons for dualism. For Descartes it was the special accessibility of the self which placed it outside the realm of an empirically dubious material world; for Kant it is the incoherence of the inner states of the self as intrinsically characterized that implies that they are outside nature, though they could not be cognized except for their reference to nature. There is little here in which the modern naturalist could take comfort.

Kant's attention to the absence of psychological laws has a modern ring. Some modern philosophers have taken what Donald Davidson calls the "anomalousness of the mental" as reason for supposing that mental events must admit of a physical description under which they behave lawfully. As Ameriks makes clear, however, Kant thought that there was good *a priori* reason for supposing that no noumenal entity could be material. Noumena have to be substances, but matter, which Kant thought was infinitely divisible, could not possibly be a substance. Ameriks also points out, however, that Kant gives no reason for denying that phenomenal

materialism could be true. But surely the crucial interpretative point is that any such reduction or elimination of the mental realm was simply not on the agenda in Kant's day. Not even the most fanatical naturalistic psychologists of the time, such as Condillac or Hume, were attempting to subsume the self under the laws of physics; rather, they took the laws of physics as models which the laws of association might copy.

In the last chapter of the book, Ameriks gives us a useful discussion of Kant's views on the ideality of the self and time. There are weak and strong versions of ideality, and Ameriks argues that Kant held the stronger version. The weak view is that since self-knowledge is parasitic on knowledge of the phenomenal world, self-knowledge is phenomenal. Consequently, we must be as agnostic about the real nature of the self as we are about the nature of reality in itself. All we know of either sort of noumenal nature is how it appears to us. The stronger view argues that self-knowledge is always knowledge of mental events in time, but the real self is not temporal, so the self cannot really have any of the mental properties we think it has. Ameriks is unable to muster any very persuasive arguments for the stronger view. None the less, he thinks the ideality of time and hence of self-knowledge is at least coherent, as against those, such as Strawson, who have argued that it is not.

I am not so sure that it is coherent. One very persuasive view holds that the phenomena are "aspects" of the noumena - they are the noumena-as-they-appear-to-us. If this is the most intelligible way of reading Kant, as I think it is, then what are we to make of change? If change requires time, and the noumenon changes in its appearance-properties, then the noumenon would be in time. So we must say, apparently, that the noumenon only apparently changes its appearance-properties. But on the other hand, if the noumenon is timeless, then the appearance-properties of noumena don't actually change. So phenomenal change and phenomenal time would also be

unreal. I agree with Strawson, against Ameriks, that there is a true fault-line here; and it is one which indicates a basic instability in Kant's whole attempt to secure a house of knowledge by erecting a complex of mutually exclusive phenomena in the realm of which determinate knowledge is possible, from which we can determine knowledge of the noumenal realm, of which we have no determinate knowledge. Something appears to break out in the phenomenal realm just where Kant had hoped to re-empt it.

Kant's general strategy of trying to set transcendental limits to philosophy generates automatically the subsequent distortion of meaning or to the minutiae of research interests, though necessary and valuable explanation of the order of appearances, he hoped to secure from doubt, just as he hoped that restricting the ambitions of the mind will to an exclusive concern with the purity of its own motives he could secure it an independent "unconditioned" status. Kant's restrictive picture of rationality starkly at odds with the expansive rationality embedded in modern science, a rationality that has not only a very wide range of ideas, if any intelligent reader should still cherish the illusion of the "morality" of the modern world, this book alone should be sufficient to shake him. Yet there are guiding lights beamed by Tierney himself in the introduction: his programme is to consider, during the period 1150-1250, seen as a continuous whole, the political, social, and ecclesiastical side by side, ecclesiastical and political theory, ideas about the church and ideas about the state. Such a statement of intent immediately suggests a comparison with J.N. Figgis's minor classic, *From Gerson to Grotius*, and Tierney himself is telling us very nearly called his own book *From Gerson to Grotius*, thus neatly bridging both a change in time and a change in the subject-matter before the fifteenth-century commentary we have in Figgis's book, and a change in the perspective from the publicistic to the private, secular and

More authorities than me

John Morrall

JOHN TIERNY

Religion, Law, and the Growth of Constitutional Thought, 1150-1650
216pp. Cambridge University Press.
£12.50.
0 521 23495 6

This little book by a distinguished scholar of medieval Canon Law and medieval thought is substantially a collection of delivered of the Wiles Lectures of 1979 in the Queen's University of Belfast. This lecture series is intended, in the words of its Trust, "to encourage the extension of historical thinking into the realm of general ideas", and Brian Tierney has amply fulfilled this noble objective. Medieval and early modern political thought has all too often been subjected in our century to gross popularization and consequent distortion of meaning or to the minutiae of research interests, though necessary and valuable explanation of the order of appearances, he hoped to secure from doubt, just as he hoped that restricting the ambitions of the mind will to an exclusive concern with the purity of its own motives he could secure it an independent "unconditioned" status. Kant's restrictive picture of rationality starkly at odds with the expansive rationality embedded in modern science, a rationality that has not only a very wide range of ideas, if any intelligent reader should still cherish the illusion of the "morality" of the modern world, this book alone should be sufficient to shake him. Yet there are guiding lights beamed by Tierney himself in the introduction: his programme is to consider, during the period 1150-1250, seen as a continuous whole, the political, social, and ecclesiastical side by side, ecclesiastical and political theory, ideas about the church and ideas about the state. Such a statement of intent immediately suggests a comparison with J.N. Figgis's minor classic, *From Gerson to Grotius*, and Tierney himself is telling us very nearly called his own book *From Gerson to Grotius*, thus neatly bridging both a change in time and a change in the subject-matter before the fifteenth-century commentary we have in Figgis's book, and a change in the perspective from the publicistic to the private, secular and

ecclesiastical, with whom he felt less at home.

There is, however, a considerable continuity in outlook between Figgis and Tierney: both are drawn to a tradition of pluralist thinking about human society, and Tierney in particular points out that this tradition may well owe its origin to the medieval tendency to create in both ecclesiastical and secular spheres (we must not yet talk about "the State") an interlocking system of communities, each with its own claim to legal autonomy, within a commonly accepted hierarchical structure. He believes that this pluralism, which has perhaps been modern society's principal bulwark against an all-encompassing sovereign State, owes far more to medieval thought and practice than it does to that of Greece and Rome - despite the undoubted preference of the early modern publicists for appeal to classical rather than medieval authorities. The preference suggests Tierney was due to the desire of sixteenth and seventeenth-century thinkers, to distance themselves from their medieval roots. One might add that the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Scholastics, such as Suarez and Bellarmine (a group who, strangely, receive hardly any attention from Tierney) were well aware of the medieval ancestry of their theories of popular sovereignty and natural rights of individual and community, and quite capable of setting aside classical Greco-Roman notions when they conflicted with those theories. Las Casas was merely making an extreme statement of a widely shared Scholastic tendency to part company (if necessary) with the classical tradition (he irritably remarked that Aristotle was only "a pagan burning in Hell") whose defence of slavery was consequently of no interest to Christians.

Apart from this rather surprising omission, Tierney's treatment of his extensive field is both concise and comprehensive. Many novel points are made. He directs our attention to the importance for medieval pluralist

theory of the debates between papalists and episcopalists about the right ordering of the church which began in Paris around 1250. Tierney argues quite correctly that this debate, on the one hand, and the theories of the jurists and collegiate character of the Church hierarchy, has been neglected by general historians of political thought. The episcopalists in question contended that the authority of bishops derived not directly from the Pope (although they did see him as the divinely appointed head of the Church) but, as John of Paris put it, from "God and the people". The parallel with the kind of qualification of royal power which the secular baronage in Western European kingdoms was attempting to make during the same period is fascinating, and a tinge of irony is added by Tierney's demonstration of the debt of Marsiglio of Padua (a "centralist" and anti-pluralist if ever there was one) to the arguments of these forgotten episcopalists against the Papacy's exclusive Petrine claims. Tierney in fact suggests that Marsiglio's theory of consent was

probably originally ecclesiastical before being applied to secular political authority. He sees the pluralism which these episcopalists were defending as being the ancestor of later, more secularized "federalist" theories of political authority, down to the United States Constitution with its aim of reconciling local autonomy with a certain measure of central direction. The same interplay between secular and ecclesiastical ideas is shown to exist in the concepts of corporate rulership and mixed constitution, to which an illuminating chapter is devoted. Tierney believes that we now badly need a systematic study of ecclesiastical theories of the concept of the mixed constitution, the purely historical value of which would be increased by the light it would shed on present debates on the nature of leadership within the Church. Indeed, not the least of the merits of Tierney's own valuable survey is the sense which it conveys of the unexhausted fertility and creative continuity of the Western constitutional tradition in both its sacred and secular branches.

The shire in session

M. T. Clanchy

ROBERT C. PALMER

The County Courts of Medieval England 1150-1350
360pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press. £26.
0 691 05341 3

The county court is one of England's oldest institutions but it has attracted few historians since the Victorians. For Stubbs the Anglo-Saxon shire moot was "a monument of the original independence of the population which it represents... the chief council of the ancient nation". Although belief in a primeval Anglo-Saxon democracy is now discarded, the fact remains that the county was a structured community from the time of King Edgar in the tenth century until the reorganization of local government in 1974.

In the Middle Ages the county and its court were synonymous. At regular meetings the gentry assembled to do the king's business and their own. This was a "court" in many senses: an enclosed space within whose four benches judgments were given; a tribunal presided over by officers of the crown; and a courtly gathering where

the knights of the shire talked and competed in accomplishment. Although by the fourteenth century many of the county's judicial functions had been delegated to special commissioners like coroners and justices, it still flourished as a political and administrative assembly; and it would do so for centuries to come. With the growth of Parliament, the county court became the essential link between Westminster and the localities.

Historians have shied away from the medieval county court because its records are sparse whereas its functions were manifold. Robert C. Palmer has already established himself as the authority on these records and has even found some new ones (law reports from Warwickshire dating from c. 1305). He is one of the new generation of American scholars who are putting fresh life into English legal history. In this his first book he demonstrates his unique knowledge of the manuscript sources in the British Library and the Public Record Office.

He addresses himself primarily to technical problems concerned with the court's jurisdiction and functioning in non-criminal litigation, as his chapter headings indicate: "Venue and Judgments"; "Suits and Judgments"; "Record, Removal, and Supervision";

"The Viscount's Writ"; "Personal Actions". Even a chapter with a broader sounding heading, "County, Courts, and Country", is mainly concerned with the return of writs.

Palmer is at his best in his chapters on "Professional Lawyers" and "Seneschals and Bailiffs". He demonstrates the professionalism of the pleader in the Warwickshire county court and sees in such men the origins of the English legal profession. The idea that the first professional lawyers came from the counties to Westminster, rather than the other way round, is an attractive one. These men were drawn from the articled knights and freemen in each county, who first learned their business orally, and who acted as attorneys and stewards for barons and monastic houses. Palmer argues convincingly that these experts dominated the business of the county in the interests of their lords. There was no democratic shirecourt in reality.

Where Palmer is less assured is in the wider aspects of the county court's business and in putting it in perspective for the historian. His dates 1150-1350 are arbitrary. The stopping point of 1350 cuts across his sources, as the important Berks and Somers plea rolls date from 1377 and 1413 respectively. The starting point of 1150 (meaning the law reforms of Henry II) obscures the antiquity of the court. Palmer's idea of "juridical integration" (that the central courts were bound together into a legal system with the county and hundred courts) owes as much to the Anglo-Saxon kings as to Henry II.

Concentration on civil litigation leads Palmer to the conventional view that the county court declined in importance by contrast with the king's court, whereas in fact the county always had been and remained one of the king's courts. Perhaps it did not so much decline as adapt to specialization among royal officials. Criminal trials in Bristol, for example, were conducted by special justices, but they did their business in and through the county court. The suppression of crime should not be looked away in an appendix, as it is in Palmer's book, but given a central place in the story. His terms of reference are dictated by the particular points he has researched (on these he is excellent) rather than by the functions of the court as a whole. This is not therefore a rounded account of the medieval county court; readers still have to turn to Stubbs, Maitland and Haden Carr for that. But it is an original work of scholarship on which the author and others can build.

Calling souls

Peter Scupham

E. J. SCOVELL

The Space Between

70pp. Secker and Warburg. £4.95.
0 436 44446 1

So where deepest silence lies
Gathered to ponds, my steps will draw:
The speechless child that sleeps or cries:
Age with the secret, not the power;
The look of utterance on the silent flower.
This stanza from "Agnes" is a
summa of Miss Scovell's concerns,
which have been pursued with
deepening consistency and increasing
certainty of tone since her first book
Shadows of Chrysanthemums, was
published in 1944. There, two central
themes were announced: an alert
sensitivity to the "language" of
flowers, with its particularities of
bright and dark, and a corresponding
sensitivity to the secret lives of small
children, caught as they move towards
maturity and death. The sequence *The
First Year* in that early book, re-
published in her 1956 collection, *The
River Steamer*, makes the unity of the
themes explicit in its first lines: "All
deeds undone, all words unsaid, Null
as a flower, sleep on my bed."

The child is threaded into a great
web of organic life; her hand is a
"chestnut fan" her thoughts "move
within like wind on grass", she
becomes "a gentle coastal creature", a
"sleeping sea-bird". Now, in *Miss
Scovell's* latest collection, the children
who have become grandchildren or the
children of strangers are observed with
the same tenderness and love. Their
crying calls her to the responsibility of
answering that cry in words:

But the cries of infants knock, and yet must
house elsewhere
From road or neighbouring garden, filling a
world of air
Like wall of lambs from a mountain stream.
It is always the "look of utterance", the
imperfect communication offered by
flower, photograph or human face
which calls out Miss Scovell's deepest
feelings: it is the mystery to which she
must respond, and like Auden's Ariel,
when she does not feel it she does not
write. She waits for "A calling soul,
calling my scrutiny" (though conscious
always, as in "Unstrained", that living
forms suffer by their commemoration
and that her scrutiny has placed an
"Abstract intensity upon them/And
made a difference I did not intend").
The "look of utterance" can be urgent,
hair-prickling, as in the opening lines
of "Visit to a Child at Night": "Why so
still, so wide-awake, cold face/And
bird-in-bramble eyes coloured with
dark darkness?" It can also be
gentle, poised with a less dramatic
intensity, a statement carrying the
implications of a question.

The mysteries to which Miss Scovell
responds are habitually accompanied

by that play of light and shade which
forms a leitmotif in her work. Colour is
often brushed in with an air of
deception, transience; she sees most
clearly through veils and gauzes. The
summer air "lies, a lustre and a down/
On the stone trees of the academic
town." Over and over again she creates
the sense of an evanescent, disguised
thing: "shadowing bloom", "a pale
pewter burnish", "the sheen of webs
and falls and flakes" - nature adjusts
her tones and half-tones with
shimmering substantiality of a water-
colour, but that substance is never
dissolved into pure impressionism.
Among her contemporaries, this alert
and serious exactitude is shared most
closely, perhaps, by Geoffrey Grigson.
Both, agnostic by temperament, are in
love with the vanishing clarities of life;
in both the sense of wonder at what to
most is quotidian is underpinned by
stoicism and a feel for the otherness of
the world.

There is no attempt to force either
the pace, or nature's hand. In "Single
Peony", an inscape is precisely
delimited: "Yet the red of the flower
is a well of reticence". This "reticence"
reappears in her 1956 collection, *The
River Steamer*, makes the unity of the
themes explicit in its first lines: "All
deeds undone, all words unsaid, Null
as a flower, sleep on my bed."

work. She knows, too, that "Pain has its
innocence: extremity/Of sorrow has its
own pure quality", and in "A Dream
Forgotten" life can, with its "iron
fabric", correspond to nightmare yet
be accepted in its totality. Its
complexity finding expression in her
paradoxical play with images: "lucid
with no source of light", "strange and
clear", "plain in complexity". She, like
her traveller Alloway in "Alloway's
Guides", is "In love with space; in love
with stringency", but finally in love
with home and the familiar wonders
moving into dust. "The Geese on the
Park Water" makes her concern
explicit: their dancing must be caught
in words, for

Time is a sluice set open
And through it, we measure, too fast
All beauty shown or spoken.
Apprehended, run to the past.
She has no sure sense that, as in
Hopkins's "The Golden Echo",
Beauty will be kept by God with
"fonder care" than we can give it. Her
flowers are not a lustre of heaven, but
"Lustre of earth that is/Not for our
purposes/And least of all things courts
our passion."

The *Space Between* is beneficent,
nutrimental, unaffected by fashion. The
poems display an unaffected grace of
diction and a sinuous fluency. Miss
Scovell's cadences are haunting; her
responses ask for an equivalent
unhurried care from the reader.

Right feelings

Carol Rumens

ADRIAN MITCHELL

For Beauty Douglas: Collected
Poems 1953-79
With pictures by Ralph Steadman
260pp. Allison and Busby: £8.95
(paperback, £4.95).
0 85051 399 6

The effect of reading Adrian Mitchell's
poetry is rather similar to that of
reading the lyrics printed on a record
sleeve. Ghosts of rhythms, flickers of
ideas, striking images that dissolve into
banality and a sense of structures
toppling away from invisible supports
suggest that the most important
dimension in these poems is their
presentation, live, from the platform.
Divorced from the music, or
performance, some of the pieces
collected here seem merely rhetorical
or sentimental, though others, the
ballads and blues-poems, for example,
can be direct and rhythmical enough to
work on the page. Those that are most
effective as poems, such as "Veteran
with a Head Wound", seem to belong
to a period (the work is not arranged

chronologically, or dated - except of
course by its subject-matter) when
Mitchell was more interested in the
formal structure and sustained
dialectic of traditional poetry.

The irritating effect of some of these
poems springs, I think, from Mitchell's
assumption of responsibility for
teaching us right from wrong. Further
to this is the sense of his own heart
being infallibly in the right place, and
of the right place being on his sleeve.
That there is a vitality and freshness in
his vision is unquestionable, but it is
not to be found in the more didactic
work, nor in the rather obvious
imitations of his mentor, William
Blake:

If I'd been born without a mind,
I would be happy, tame and kind.
People came, saying good things,
So many people, saying good things,
I hid my eyes under my skin,
And so they never saw right in.

Mitchell's real strength lies in his
sense of humour; this surely is the
source of his popularity with audiences
everywhere of the solemnities of the Poetry
Reading. Under the sugar-coated
public conscience publishes a genuinely
maverick, essentially English (and
bourgeois?) debunker of pretensions,
the good-humoured satirist revealed in

Soft cushionings

Tim Dooley

MEDBH MCGUCKIAN

The Flower Master

51pp. Oxford University Press. £4.
0 19 211949 4

In his rather condescending poem "A
Bookshop Idyll", Kingsley Amis
characterized the work of women poets
by "the awful way their poems lay them
open". Medbh McGuckian's first full
collection demonstrates a determined
unwillingness to assume such an
undignified position. Her poem "The
Sofa", which has as little to do with
furniture as Cowper's poem of the
same title, finds her refusing "to open/
An already open window": in
"Tulips", she praises the "defensive
mechanisms" of those flowers above
the open and accepting "sherry-glass/
Of the daffodil". What she refers to in
"The Downy Murder" are her "love of
heavy clothing" is not, however, an
indulgence in obscurity for its own
sake. Repeatedly in her poems an
aversion is expressed to hardness and
clarity as if they exemplified a
predominantly masculine logic which
leaves no room for the "curtainings and
cushionings" which, in "That Year",
she associates with the needs of her
own, less will-driven imagination.

Tulips, she reminds us
... are sacrificed to plot, their faces
Lifted many times to the artistry of light -
In love with a deeper sort
Of illness than the womanliness
Of tulips with their bee-dark hearts.
"Womanliness" - an assertive
quality neither traditionally feminine,
nor yet feminist in an ideologically
strained way - is both the source and
subject of much of McGuckian's
poetry. She takes a particular interest
in the historic position of women in the
visual arts, whether displayed as
models, or neglected as craftsmen,
and shows how their "narrative
secretes its own values" despite
attempts to conceal the importance of
the contribution. She takes
traditional decorative crafts seriously,
rejecting the suggestion that they
might be dismissed as self-indulgence
or relaxation. One of her most
successful poems, "The Seed-Picture",
describes the way in which the portrait
of a friend is built up by the application
of coloured seeds:

The eyelids oatmeal, the irises
Of Dutch blue maw, black ripe
For the pupils, mallow
For the vicious beige circles underneath.
The activity of this portrait-maker has
similarities with the processes of her
own writing:

... the clairvoyance
Of seed-work has opened up
New spectrums of activity, beyond a second
home.

The seeds dictate their own vocabulary,
More than we can plan.

There is nothing tearful about the
goodbyes aimed by John Ash in this
book, which the Poetry Book Society
has made its Autumn Choice. Rather
he intends them to be the first parting
shots in a whole. Valued for his
movement. On the back cover Ash, a
thirty-four-year-old Mancunian, offers
a foretaste of his materials and his
methods; a volley of nouns introduces
the rat-tat-tat of his manifesto:

Angels. Rain. Musical animals.
Sonnets. Branded intersections.
Archtrunks. Cracked, black glass.
Office buildings in sunsets. Those
puppet theatres you used to be able
to make up from the backs of
breakfast cereal packets ... Music,
not painting, as paradigm ... Large
rhythmic units, not "metrically exact
lines", not iambs except as
ancestral ghosts ... Variations with
the "theme" well concealed ...
Conversations, not sermons.
Lyricism, not messages. The image
of a better world presented without
false optimism.

True to these aims, and to the
manner in which they are advertised,
the so-called "divertimento" is a
package of contrived incoherence,
loudly sensitive to its own radical
nature. Ash's tactics resemble John
Ashberry's, and like Ashberry's they
dominate the poems they produce. The
title of one poem, "The Grapefruit
Segments: A Book of Preludes",
exemplifies his reaction against
conventional form, both in its absurd
self-styling (elsewhere he calls a sonnet
"Symphony") and in its position
that poetic time may consist of a
sequence of beginnings. One of the
half-imagined artefacts of the "better
world" that Ash's iconoclasm will leave
us is a clock face that tells "our time",
as usual the pronoun is mysterious - "in
generous periods like Schubert". Ash's
own periods, or "large rhythmic
units", are certainly generous, and
Schubertian in so far as most of them
are made to look unfinished. He likes
Mcrescences with anarchic tricks (a
fatigued "And ...") or to subject
them to the "random metamorphoses/
or sudden accessions of memory" of
which grapefruit segments are an
example. In the choice between
breakfast and art, Ash is first to the
spoon, strutting conventional eggs
into runny prose:

... the exclusive concern with "loving" and
"possession" is terrible; in the end, people have no other
reality.

The elaboration of McGuckian's
poetry cannot be dismissed as a
pointlessly decorative embroidery.
The trust she places in instinct and
chance allocation is not the result of
"guesswork" but of an awareness that
a hitherto underrepresented view of
experience may need radically
different forms of expression. By
turning on its head Yeats's proposition
that "there's more enterprise / In
walking naked" and by letting her
experience dictate its own private
vocabulary, McGuckian achieves the
kind of artistic "opening up" and
personal liberation that the women
described in "The Seed-Picture" are
only able to "sigh for".

The areas which McGuckian has
been particularly successful in opening
up tend to be intimate ones, involving
sexuality or relations between different
generations in a family. Her frequent
use of monologue allows her to
establish a personal tone which suits
these concerns, while her employment
of indeterminate first-person speakers
prevents a vulgarly confessional
identification of poet and narrative
voice. This is particularly effective in
the family poems where the tensions
between a worldly and sceptical
generation and their pious and
suspicious parents are shown from
several angles. So, in "Your House",

Random segments

Mick Imlah

JOHN ASH

The Goodbyes

63pp. Manchester: Carcanet. £3.25.
0 85655 423 6

Though interpretation is unhelpful
"loving" and "possession" suggest
as good a reason as to understand
a poem; an urge which Ash would
denies in a sequence whose movement
is willfully graceless and, because it
random, infinitely surprising.

Because the poet is waging tactical
war on expectation, our expectations
as good as the indication of his success
as pleasure or interest. We expect, for
example, an authoritative imagination
instead we get a suggestive
inadequacy: "What are the people like
there? How do they live? ... I don't
I've never been there, but that what
stop me telling you all about it." In fact
it is Ash's first concern not to tell us
about "it". His introduction warns that
that "theme" is "well concealed" and
challenging and deriding the usual
it; people and places that are
embody it have their identity
carefully ironized out of them. Ash
particularly mischievous ...
pronouns, and likes to draw attention
to the vacuum that the
interchangeableness creates: "Every
thing was tired and wanted to go
to bed. We did, and you. Also they. And
it." The frustration caused by an
imagination working in this apparently
pointless way against itself is minimized
in Ash's intimations of "Stranger in
the Corridor":

with vague attributes, they all wonder
at one time or another. Often
I wish they would stay longer. If not to
then perhaps to take on some more central
form.

His disembodied voices, or
voiceless bodies move in landscape
that are also deliberately surreal.
The technique of soft-focus
impressionism is varied by the
multiple definition; the building
"Them/There" (a typically
mystifying little, dedicated to
the memory of Erik Satie) are
"hence-coops" or "Pierced" (dis-
Nissen hut. Such a raid on
the mausoleum). To so little, my
shows the incompatibility of what
blurb calls Ash's "width of awareness"
with his substitution of reference for
conventional representation.

Behind Ash's evasive patterns
genuine lyrical gift insists on expression
itself. "If the river falls over a cliff the
is high enough / It will never reach
ground: it will end / In random
hundred feet up." But fragments
as this need a context to direct
the reader's eye and mind.

The exclusive concern with "loving" and
"possession" is terrible; in the end, people have no other
reality.

both the "matted walk-through
rooms" and "The running water of
speaker" are beguiled by the
generation's planned childlessness,
"barely breathable importance", the
"Lychees" explores the irrational
of which may be produced by a break in
traditional values:

You wonder at that Georgian terrace
Miles out of town where the modern
begin

My great-grandfather was a con-
And knew how far away he was in the
By mysteries of the Rosary. My

You could tell a good husband
By the thumbed leaves of his prayer-book

A dead loss, my mother counts you.
Setting my teeth on edge at all hours.
Getting me to break the lychee's skin.
She underestimates the taste of sex.
The irrelevance of distances,
Cat's eyes, the cleanliness of hands.

Distance, however, is a quality
Medbh McGuckian can overcome
allowing her preference to
associations and impressions
into definitions and names to give
writing a too uniformly soft focus
leading her to idealize a turn-of-
century "barbarous world" to the point
of sentimentality. That said, *The Flower
Master* remains one of the richest and
most provocative collections of poetry
to have appeared in recent years.

they are shut away for life inside this
frame that show
no graceful or surprising movement. Ash
a kind of movement we want above all
But there is conflict.

Very dear Nadia, Be assured that I
am experiencing the same feelings
and difficulties as you. I too would
like to be able to write everything to
you at length, as I would like to be
able to speak with you, but I am so
consumed by my work that I must
limit myself to imperative occasions

Liters, for Stravinsky, were not a
means of exchanging views or
developing his ideas, but simply of
doing business. It is precisely because
he does not waste time and energy on
things that his work goes well, "very
well". Thus anyone who had
expected the publication of his
correspondence would shed light on
the most calamatic of artists will be
disappointed. They will only find
confirmed here what they knew
already: that everything in his life was
subordinated to composition; that,
from the end of the First World War to
the end of his life, over fifty years later,

composer is an awareness of human
Passion, which fuses suffering with joy,
so conducive to superhuman ecstasy.
This is why the peace generated by
Bach's music, even at its most
tormented, "passeth understanding".

WILFRIED MELLERS
The Music of Johann Sebastian Bach:
The Choral Works
240pp. Fairleigh Dickinson University
Press. Distributed by Associated
University Presses. £13.50.
0 8566 1682 8

If we think of Bach as the most
"typical" composer in European
history it is because he stands at a cross-
roads, consummating centuries of
evolution from the Middle Ages to his
own time, in which he was deeply
rooted, while also anticipating the
Romantic era. His musical techniques
therefore may be said to constitute a
"class" of his while all music since the
Renaissance, at least until some music
of the immediate present - involves
vertical (or space, horizontal and
vertical) in this quality more tensely
manifest than in Bach. The complex
harmony of Bach's harmony depends on
the fact that it is created by the
simultaneous sounding of many
independent. Whereas
polyphony for the most part
relates to the harmonic and tonal
structure which defines the earthly
realm of human and humane
being, Bach's polyphony, often
winding round temporal progression,
represents the humanly simultaneously
physical and metaphysical. In no

The business of the composer

Gabriel Josipovici

ROBERT CRAFT (Editor)

Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence
Volume 1

411pp. Faber. £25.
0 571 11724 4

To say that Stravinsky was no great
letter writer would be an under-
statement. The typical Stravinsky
letter goes like this:

Thank you for your letter, my very
dear one. What you write surprises
me, but I am sure that all will go well
and work out for you. I am
convinced of it. Now to business. (1)
Symphonies: fortunately Koussevitzky
has nothing to do with this; it is
mine. The score is with Chester in
London, and I ask 150 Swiss francs
(if that is expensive, tell me what you
can pay). (2) Address of A.
Rubinstein: Hotel du Palais in
Blaritz. He is leaving at the end of
the month and is not coming to
London. (3) The composition of the
opera is going well, very well even,
and you will like it. It is quite
different from anything that I have
done. I have finished [Three
Movements from] *Petrushka* for
Rubinstein, a very virtuosic
transcription. No more room. I
entrance you. I Stravinsky.

In those, like Nadia Boulanger,
towards whom he seems to have felt
genuine affection, as he did not for
Ansermet, to whom the above letter is
written, he might begin a little more
equivocally, but the basic pattern
remains identical.

Very dear Nadia, Be assured that I
am experiencing the same feelings
and difficulties as you. I too would
like to be able to write everything to
you at length, as I would like to be
able to speak with you, but I am so
consumed by my work that I must
limit myself to imperative occasions

Leaving aside in this letter all
questions of a division of authors'
rights, publication, etc., which will
be the object of a special meeting
between us, I would like these lines
to stand as a testimony to my
promise of mutual agreement to
keep our collaboration a secret, not
only for as long as it lasts, but even
after the piece is finished, that is to
say, never to speak of it in any form
(books, letters, articles, interviews,
lectures).

In the case, improbable, I hope,
that we do not reach an accord on the
aforementioned business aspect
(authors' rights, publication, etc.)
and that the collaboration does not
occur, I reserve the right to realize
my idea in any form. I guard my idea
of a musical piece with a Latin text
very jealously.

I embrace you, I Stravinsky.
Note the care with which this letter is

he followed a punishing schedule, as
both composer and performer (soloist
and conductor of his own works); that
he was unwilling ever to do anything
for nothing; and that he would not
suffer fools gladly.

Nevertheless, though the letters do
not stand comparison with
Schoenberg's or even with Berg's, they
are not without interest. The man's
personality was so strong that it
emerges in the organization and the
choice of words of even the most
factual business-like letter. Reading
through this correspondence one
comes to realize that his concern with
money, for instance, was not due
simply to an unfortunate combination
of meanness and a fondness for high
living, but of his realism and of his
desire for precision in all things. Music
cannot be measured in dollars, but
since it is a commodity as well as an art
it is important that it be accepted as
such and not undersold. The well-
known letter to Cocteau about the
Oedipus Rex collaboration brings out
well Stravinsky's disconcerting refusal
to separate the public and the private
aspect of art which is such a feature of
his art itself.

My dear Jean, For some time now I
have been pursued by the idea of
composing an opera in Latin on the
subject of a tragedy of the ancient
world, with which everyone would
be familiar. I would like to entrust
the verbal aspect of this work to you,
as I proposed the other day. The
scenario as well as the setting would
be realized through our intimate
collaboration. I write these lines to
you, impelled by the desire to
establish with the utmost clarity the
terms for anything that might arise
from such a collaboration.

Leaving aside in this letter all
questions of a division of authors'
rights, publication, etc., which will
be the object of a special meeting
between us, I would like these lines
to stand as a testimony to my
promise of mutual agreement to
keep our collaboration a secret, not
only for as long as it lasts, but even
after the piece is finished, that is to
say, never to speak of it in any form
(books, letters, articles, interviews,
lectures).

In the case, improbable, I hope,
that we do not reach an accord on the
aforementioned business aspect
(authors' rights, publication, etc.)
and that the collaboration does not
occur, I reserve the right to realize
my idea in any form. I guard my idea
of a musical piece with a Latin text
very jealously.

I embrace you, I Stravinsky.
Note the care with which this letter is

The vertical dimension

WILFRIED MELLERS

THE MUSIC OF JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH:
THE CHORAL WORKS
240pp. Fairleigh Dickinson University
Press. Distributed by Associated
University Presses. £13.50.
0 8566 1682 8

If we think of Bach as the most
"typical" composer in European
history it is because he stands at a cross-
roads, consummating centuries of
evolution from the Middle Ages to his
own time, in which he was deeply
rooted, while also anticipating the
Romantic era. His musical techniques
therefore may be said to constitute a
"class" of his while all music since the
Renaissance, at least until some music
of the immediate present - involves
vertical (or space, horizontal and
vertical) in this quality more tensely
manifest than in Bach. The complex
harmony of Bach's harmony depends on
the fact that it is created by the
simultaneous sounding of many
independent. Whereas
polyphony for the most part
relates to the harmonic and tonal
structure which defines the earthly
realm of human and humane
being, Bach's polyphony, often
winding round temporal progression,
represents the humanly simultaneously
physical and metaphysical. In no

composer is an awareness of human
Passion, which fuses suffering with joy,
so conducive to superhuman ecstasy.
This is why the peace generated by
Bach's music, even at its most
tormented, "passeth understanding".

The horizontal-vertical cross on
which Bach's technique is founded is
naturally most evident in his choral
writing, wherein subtly self-
sufficient polyphonies and rigorous
counterpoints stimulate, and indeed
create, the maximum harmonic
density, and wherein, complementarily,
resonantly homophonic textures
owe their momentum to the vitality of
each separate melodic strand. Bach's
chorale harmonizations are the
fundament of his art: in rendering them
human beings "gather together" to
praise God, and his musical techniques
therefore may be said to constitute a
"class" of his while all music since the
Renaissance, at least until some music
of the immediate present - involves
vertical (or space, horizontal and
vertical) in this quality more tensely
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realm of human and humane
being, Bach's polyphony, often
winding round temporal progression,
represents the humanly simultaneously
physical and metaphysical. In no

written (not helped, here, by the poor
translation, which gives, for example,
the meaningless "in the case" for "dans
le cas", "in the event"), and the
lawyer's desire to clarify and to avoid
all misunderstanding (Stravinsky, after
all, had studied law, not music). Note
also the way in which he barely
separates the deep mysteries of art
("For some time now I have been
pursued by the idea ...") and the
practicalities of collaboration (division
of authors' rights, etc.). With most
artists either the creative or the
financial aspect of art is usually passed
over in embarrassed silence, but not
with Stravinsky. He treats the
imagination, its dictates and pleasures,
as no less but no more real than such
things as the organization of rehearsals
and the provision for the collecting of
money. What he never reveals is
everything that will lead up to the
finished work. That is his own business
and no one else's. It is no one else's
because it is his business. The music,
once composed, is not his any more,
just as it was not his before it was
composed. His task is not so much to
invent it as to find it.

This unwillingness to make a fuss
about the gifts of so-called creativity
goes with a quite unromantic lack of
guilt about the pleasures art can give.

In two weeks", he writes to
Ansermet, "I will answer your
questions on the subject of my new
work. I want to conduct it myself. Do
not think that this reflects a lack of
confidence in you; that remains
unshakable. But I do not want to
deprive myself of this great joy. And I
am certain that it will be in good hands,
because the good God has endowed me
with performing talent." This is not
smugness; it is, in fact, a kind of
humility, and the whole letter conveys
a religious sense of the world, though
not one that will have much appeal to
the Protestant mentality. By the same
token the works, once written, must be
protected from degradation by the
mere whim of others. So, again to
Ansermet:

Two words in response to your
strange note of the 15th, *mon cher*. I
am sorry, but I cannot allow you to
make any cuts in *Jeux de cartes*. The
absurd one that you propose cripples
my little March, which has its form
and constructive sense in the totality
of the composition. You cut out
only my March because its position
and its development please you less
than the rest. In my eyes, this is not
sufficient reason, and I would like to
say: "But you are not *chez vous*, *mon
cher* ..."

The letters do not give us any
glimpses into Stravinsky's workshop.

There is only one work, *Agon*, that can
be followed (in the letters to Lincoln
Kirstein) from the original demand for
a ballet to form a trilogy with *Apollo*
and *Orpheus*, through various
discarded ideas ("the idea you and
George have of doing 'a ballet to end
all ballet' - well, limits are precisely
what I need and am looking for above
all in everything I compose. The limits
generate the form"), to its sudden
germination and right up to its first
performance. Nor does Stravinsky
write about the composers he loved
and admired, and even his biting
comments on his contemporaries are
few and far between: on Mahler's
Eighth: "Imagine that during two
hours you are made to understand that
two times two is four"; on Strauss: "It
so many years since I heard the
Heldenleben that I could no longer
understand a single measure by this
German composer. What horrible
music!" and on Shostakovich's *Lady
Macbeth*: "The work is lamentably
provincial; the music plays a miserable
role as illustration, in a very
embarrassing realistic style."

Perceptive as these comments are
they are not enough in a volume of four
hundred and fifty large pages. And the
general monotony of the letters is not
helped by Robert Craft's presentation.
He has chosen to give us Stravinsky's
correspondence not chronologically
but by correspondent. Thus this first
volume includes letters to and from
Maurice Delage, V. V. Derzhan-
ovsky, Cocteau, Ansermet,
Boulanger, Kirstein, Auden, and Craft
himself. It is not easy to understand the
reasons behind this decision. For it is
not as though Stravinsky had had a
really rich and fruitful exchange with
any of these people. At the same time it
robs us of one of the great pleasures of
reading a volume of letters, which is to
see a life unfolding without the
intervention of a biographer. Because
presumably there are not enough
letters to his parents extant to make a
separate section practicable, we are
deprived the marvellous letter he wrote
to them in his teens (published by Craft
in *Stravinsky in Pictures and
Documents*), in which he writes: "I
have made a sketch of a sunset ... and
now would like to have the opportunity
to see a number of good pictures so that
I can become even more dissatisfied
with my own work. Only in such
circumstances can I be certain of
making progress ...", and where we
already hear the inimitable Stravinsky
tone.

There is also the fact that Craft
intrudes at every point. Often his
footnotes take up half the page.
Sometimes they are of no conceivable

Growing up in Senegal

James Kirkup

NAFISSATOU DIALLO

A Dakar Childhood
Translated by Dorothy S. Blair
134pp. Longman. £1.25.
0 582 78550 2

Nafissatou Diallo is not a professional writer, but she has a keen eye and ear, a sense of the ridiculous and the pathetic in human life, and a great gift for putting her lively and attractive personality on paper without artifice or humbug.

Now forty years old, and working as a midwife at the Maternity and Child Welfare Centre in Ouagou-Niane, Senegal, she at once disarms us in her modest foreword by saying

I am not the heroine of a novel but an ordinary woman of this country, Senegal: a mother and a working woman. . . . For the last few weeks I have started to write. What would a woman write about who has no claim to any exceptional imagination or outstanding literary talent? She could only write about herself, of course. So here are my memories of my childhood and adolescence. Senegal has changed in a generation. Perhaps it is worth reminding today's youngsters what we were like when we were their age.

She was born in Tjène in the

"Guards' Camp" that is now the Iba Mar Diop Stadium, and her home, one of the few civilian dwellings in that part of town, was a large brick house built by her grandfather and father with the help of uncles, cousins and brothers, most of whom were employed in the family business. It was a very large and well-knit family, with grandmothers, sisters, brothers, uncles, aunts and cousins and innumerable visiting relatives and friends.

I must emphasize the atmosphere which reigned in our homes in those days. It was not just a question of families being united and standing up for each other; you can still find that today. But what has become rare now is the integrity, the honesty, the mutual respect and the sincere piety that we were taught not only by precept but by example.

The Muslim religion plays a large part in this book, and in the formation of the author's strong, admirable character. But it is a religion without stiffness or hypocrisy, pure and severe, yet intensely human and compassionate. Nafissatou Diallo had a great sense of fun, and was often mischievous, naughty, and flirtatious. Like most children, she committed petty thefts and told lies, she was a vivacious tomboy who cooked up all kinds of comical schemes to get her own way in a very conventional and highly-disciplined household; yet she had her serious side, and would say her prayers even in the lavatory. Her deep love and respect for her parents and

grandparents, comes out very movingly at the end of the book, with the death of her father and of her beloved grandmother Mame — one of those solid, stable, strict but loving African women who are the life and soul of their families, and whom their youthful charges never forget.

There are some brilliant descriptions of dances and festivals: the "Simb", the mock-lion game, with maids of honour, pages and the beautiful, elegant *gbor-jigèh*, or transvestite men, with their powdered faces and eyes outlined with kohl, their palms and soles brightened with henna; the solemn circumcision ceremonies for young boys, and sacrifices for people possessed of a *jinnee* — practices opposed to strict Islamic belief, but the child attended them, fascinated by the ritual songs and dances. Nafissatou gets her first long dress, and has her hair done in complicated *adama* style, so tightly plaited with beads that it gave her a headache; the native dress of boubou, jellaba and pagne also plays a very important part in her life, for she has a love of finery and social display.

There are some episodes which may strike a European reader as cruel or even immoral, as when the girls in her class torment the town's beggars, who are lepers, and when, on a train trip to Saint-Louis, Nafissatou causes pain and suffering to a poor old man suffering from asthma who wants the train window closed; but she keeps opening it to let out the smells of

cockerels and baskets of smoked fish, thus causing further attacks. And there are some entertaining episodes about cheating at school, fighting with girls and flirting with boys. Nafissatou's first "steady" boy friend deserts and disappoints her, but then she has the *coup de foudre*, love at first sight for a magnificently handsome young man, who miraculously returns her love. But first he has to go to France to study for two years, and she has to pass her examinations in midwifery, something she does with distinction, despite the initial horror she feels in the delivery-rooms. There is deep sorrow at the long illness and death of her father and Mame, but in the end her religion stands her in good stead, and her strong if not always orthodox Islamic faith carries her through to a happy marriage and a busy, successful professional life.

As she writes, so much has changed in Senegal during the last twenty-five years. The immense sums of money spent on presents at baptisms, weddings and funerals are no longer a feature of social life; young people are no much freer in the expression of their emotions, and family life is not so close-knit, while even in the author's childhood the art of the griot was in decline. This is a classic African autobiography. Though it does not have the poetry and gift for language of Camara Laye's *The African Child*, it is worthy of a place beside it. An "ordinary woman" — yes, but extraordinarily so.

In the Labyrinth

Michael Butler

FRIEDRICH DORRENNATT

Stoffe
I — III
357pp. Zürich: Diogenes.
3 257 01614 X

This volume represents the first of the books of a projected six in which Friedrich Dürrenmatt has set out to examine the complex relationship between life and imagination, experience and creativity. Beginning with the author's serious illness over a decade ago, the *Stoffe* not only records the results of Dürrenmatt's thinking but also illuminates its structure and emotional roots in his own Switzerland. The "materials" of the title refer to the major obsessions which dominated Dürrenmatt's imaginative world for over forty years, both in terms of his completed literary production and those fragments which still await a final, convincing form.

In this unconventional "history" of writing career Dürrenmatt highlights only those moments of his life which have had a significant impact on his creative work. Thus his childhood in early student years — the period covered in these three books — is stripped down to one dominant experience: the recognition of the world (whether his home village in the Emmentaler, or Berne and Zürich) as a labyrinth in which the individual is trapped, dimly aware that he is Minotaur and Theseus, who paradoxically share a common identity.

A story rounds off each book: "Der Winterkrieg in Tibet", "Mein finsterer" (an early narrative version of the play *Der Besuch der alten Dame*) and "Der Rebell", all of which reflect the absurdity of a society struggling characterized by cynicism, fear and moral blindness. Written into the autobiographical account, to which these extended metaphors relate, are short philosophical and political essays, records of Dürrenmatt's important relationships with his painters Varlin and Walter Jonker, key meetings with Rudolf Kasper, his less conclusive one with Brock, and an integral part of his journey of rebellion against the cruelty and senselessness of the world. Both painter and writer, Dürrenmatt's revolt consists in confronting an opaque and threatening reality with a black wit that only men of deep seriousness can afford.

In their fascinating interplay of the sentimental retrospective and the analysis of contemporary social malaise, the *Stoffe* belong firmly to the "new" Dürrenmatt who emerged after his final disillusionment with the theatre in the mid-1970s. Formally, the volume continues the subtle interplay of the *Mittschmerz-Komplex* and the *Israel Essay* of 1976. All three works underline Dürrenmatt's unshakable belief in the imagination as a creative path to truth.

"Man's enemy is his shadow," Dürrenmatt writes in "Der Winterkrieg in Tibet", and the rebellion is constantly projected onto these pages as a confused projection of the subterranean passages of his own mind. But precisely in man's ability to fear, lies precisely in his ability to fashion images of his predicament and thus establish — the necessary condition for escaping from stifling constrictions. It is to be hoped that the concluding instalment of the series will arrive before the final chapter of Dürrenmatt's life is written.

In Billy Cooper's *Jolly Marrow* (1975) Methuen. £5.50. 0 413 18588 8 the piece she wrote for *The Sunday Times* on her visit to Australia in 1980, and which appeared in a condensed form, is now published in full. Also included are the first of long articles she wrote for *The Sunday* on men. These, together, entitled "The day of the wimp".

FICTION

Central powers

Andrew Hislop

H. R. F. KEATING

The Lucky Alphonse
180pp. Enigma. £6.95.
0 7478 3000 7

Trollism, in all its forms, implies contemporaneity. Only does the most literal of its physical expressions demand geometry. Though, at least guarantees that all participants, provided they are conscious, are in the know. With more discrete, less selfless, the author's serious illness over a decade ago, the *Stoffe* not only records the results of Dürrenmatt's thinking but also illuminates its structure and emotional roots in his own Switzerland. The "materials" of the title refer to the major obsessions which dominated Dürrenmatt's imaginative world for over forty years, both in terms of his completed literary production and those fragments which still await a final, convincing form.

H. R. F. Keating, showing once again that his talents are not monotonously coupled to Inspector Ghote, offers us in *The Lucky Alphonse* a fictional *ménage à trois*: three witty, ironic tales set in very different surroundings — India, Ireland, and Africa — but linked by their relationship to "The Lucky Alphonse", a bizarre "classic" dirty joke (in Keating's opinion "neither very dirty nor very funny") which suggests a contagious trollism among censors. Reduced to almost mindless essentials, the joke tells of a hotel guest assaulted at the sight of his room-mate, Alphonse (who never answers his call), lying in the sun with the Head waiter and the Chef. The Manager is amused but his only comment when confronted with this prostrate miniature is "Ah, ze lucky Alphonse, in ze middle again."

Unlike a hidden key which is revealed at the last moment in detective fiction, Keating's explanation of his literary game precedes his stories of three "Alphonse": Afonso Noronha, a light, ambitious member of the Indian Foreign Service, Fonsy Noonan, an Irish petty crook-cum-police-informer, and Alfons Neumayr, a German professor of history with a Metempsychic belief in the balance of power.

The stories, however, are not simple elaborations of the joke. Its trollism, though not quite touching, does tip everyone the wink. We know who's with whom if not exactly who's "catering" for whom. The *Joke* is not the guest's discovery of the three, but the manager's knowing acceptance of the situation. The delights of the centre are favoured, not the frustrations of being the pig in the middle. Alphonse is lucky. Keating's Alphonse, as it is here, is the news that "the Prince" might be buying Camille's Manor first becomes public and sets every mind agog with speculation about how personal gain might be wrought from the forthcoming event. The county ladies' thoughts turn immediately to their daughters. Lady Evers, wife of the ex-Governor of the Laxative Islands, determines that her daughter Charlotte, horse and very good at Directors' lunches, should use her cooking talents to infiltrate the Prince's entourage. Sybil Paxton, wife of the local "bigshot" owner of Buggins Brushes, in spite of being confined to a wheelchair is all set to make the most of the Prince's impending arrival. The only fly in her ointment is her daughter Jo, who has joined a religious sect in which the accent is, according to the local *ad id*, heavily on pot and free love. She dresses in filthy clothes and never washes her hair. How she can be persuaded to become suitable Prince-fodder, which of course underneath it all she is, provides one of the more exercising of Sybil Paxton's problems.

The Shipton Wick and District Ecology Group, headed by the butch and bossy Judy Mustard, see the arrival of the Prince as a golden opportunity to get him on their side over the burning gassing-of-badgers issue. Angus McBean, a mysterious but magnetic new arrival in the village, with a fiery red beard, becomes a leading light in the ecology group, but as one might have guessed from his predilection for beef stew and a sly lot of Scotch in his oak leaf, claret, he has sinister connections with a terrorist group, the Levantine Liberation League, who plan to kidnap the Prince on the day of the Opening Meet.

balance of power is tested in various political and personal situations which alter as information is given and received by the forces in the power-game. But appropriately it is in the middle story that Keating's interest in creating triangular tropes is most apparent, because here the struggles are not between lovers or political powers but between absurd characters in a comic low-life. The very ignorance and pathos of the comic-loving simpleton, Fonsy, the butt of cops and robbers alike, makes his survival — by exploiting others through controlling information — all the more remarkable.

Keating's almost Sartrean obsession with self and others is more playful than morbid. His stories are not shackled by theory. They are well-written entertainments which stand on their own; were it not for the explanatory preamble the unsuspecting reader might fail to notice the extent of the triple echoes which permeate the text. As Lytton Strachey implied when he said that he would try to come between his sister and the lustful German soldier, the *via media* is an ambiguous position. After this book even joke Alphonse will be unsure whether their proper place is in *The Joke* of Sex or *L'Esprit et le Néant*, whether for them *"l'affaire . . . or l'enfer, c'est les autres"*.

Small-town times

Mary Furness

ELSPETH HUXLEY

The Prince Buys the Manor: An Extravaganza
215pp. Chatto and Windus. £6.95.
0 7011 2651 5

So packed with incident is this chronicle-of-the-everyday life of ordinary people in the small Gloucestershire town of Shipton Wick, that reading it leaves one breathless. A cast of hundreds romp spiritedly through its pages, nursing ambitions, suffering setbacks, revealing only too human hypocrisies and snobberies.

The Salon Marie Rose, where the female population of Shipton Wick, from Mrs Sprogs to Lady Pandora Gwent, go to have their hair tinted or permmed, set or tangled-tossed, is the nurturing ground of all rumours. It is here that the news that "the Prince" might be buying Camille's Manor first becomes public and sets every mind agog with speculation about how personal gain might be wrought from the forthcoming event. The county ladies' thoughts turn immediately to their daughters. Lady Evers, wife of the ex-Governor of the Laxative Islands, determines that her daughter Charlotte, horse and very good at Directors' lunches, should use her cooking talents to infiltrate the Prince's entourage. Sybil Paxton, wife of the local "bigshot" owner of Buggins Brushes, in spite of being confined to a wheelchair is all set to make the most of the Prince's impending arrival. The only fly in her ointment is her daughter Jo, who has joined a religious sect in which the accent is, according to the local *ad id*, heavily on pot and free love. She dresses in filthy clothes and never washes her hair. How she can be persuaded to become suitable Prince-fodder, which of course underneath it all she is, provides one of the more exercising of Sybil Paxton's problems.

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The setting may be parochial but the

Nineties neglect

Colin Greenland

M. JOHN HARRISON

In Viriconium
126pp. Gollancz. £7.95.
0 575 03212 X

"Viriconium is all the cities there have ever been", writes Audsley King the painter in her *Reminiscences*. She may, however, be exaggerating. It shows, for example, a distinct preference for European elements from the turn of the century. What it may be is all the cities there will ever be, cobbled together by untrustworthy gods from the leftovers of civilization at the end of time. But here is only a very thin slice of Viriconium, to set by those already recorded by Harrison in *The Pastel City* and *A Storm of Wings*; and Audsley King is not a very informed authority. She is something of a recluse, an invalid nursing in her shabby rooms by Fat Mam Etella, the fortune teller and card-sharp from the *City of Unrealized Time*. Her memory is in any case unreliable. This book even joke Alphonse will be unsure whether their proper place is in *The Joke* of Sex or *L'Esprit et le Néant*, whether for them *"l'affaire . . . or l'enfer, c'est les autres"*.

painter, to rescue Audsley King, against her will. "Here", comments King, "we are prone to a fevered imagination."

Harrison's own imagination may be fervid in its inventiveness, but he writes with a cool and disciplined hand. His prose is always elegant, but never vain; cheerfully he underpins suavity with snags of brute fact and an unexpected pathos. He bullies his fantasies into line with reality by exposing them as equally shabby. Unerringly he seeks the underside of things. Stranded in Viriconium, their own creation, are two of the elder gods, doing penance for some obscure fault by "trying to become human" — from the bottom up. They are the Barley brothers, Gog and Matey, and they have got as far as hooliganism. They spend their days and nights staggering around the city like a skinhead Tweedledum and Tweedledee, pelting each other with rotten fruit and chanting about Bullin's and Wolverhampton. Occasionally they still create things: donkey jackets, or the small white polystyrene trays of congealed food Ashlyme finds abandoned in the street on his periodic ventures down to the Artists' Quarter. The Barley brothers are a characteristic coup of Harrison's imagination, a ludicrous insult to his precious, decrepit metropolis.

Harrison would never admit to satire, but the Artist's Quarter (Montmartre with a dash of Bloomsbury) is in the Plague Zone of the Low City, which is so depressed that everything there is becoming less real. In the High City, meanwhile, society continues to entertain itself, unmalarmed by the encroaching ontological famine. The Marchioness "L" takes the sun with her latest novelist on the Terrace of the Fallen Leaves. He admires the famous curve of her upper arm. She wonders about sending Audsley King a donation — she is, after all, the great painter of the age — but resigns herself to watching the Barley brothers, who are wallowing in the canal again. In *Viriconium* is a study of decadence, with considered echoes — such as the fleeting quotations which might be from Baudelaire, the fact that Ashlyme looks like Swinburne, or that the name "Audsley" is a contraction of Aubrey Beardsley (which Gollancz have acknowledged in the jacket design, though it ought also, of course, to be one of their Yellow Books). Harrison is alluding to the Nineties rather than making a point about them; alluding also, perhaps, to his own position as an isolated castaway from the *New Worlds* group of the early 1970s, a singular stylist, subversive but not quite fashionable — which is a pity.

Falling for the gloss

Lindsay Duguid

RACHEL BILLINGTON

Occasions of Sin
315pp. Hamish Hamilton. £7.95.
0 241 10883 9

In Roman Catholic doctrine an "occasion of sin" is a set of circumstances which would lead someone to sin; if you place yourself knowingly in such circumstances, then you are already committing a sin. Rachel Billington's novel deals with just such a set of circumstances, describing in some detail how her vaguely Catholic heroine Laura progresses from being a "good" to a "fallen" woman. Laura falls in love with a young computer expert, Martin, and having tried to resist temptation for a few chapters, abandons her QC husband, her son, her lovely home and the air-pur to live with him and bear his child.

As with other novels concerned almost solely with adultery, the success or failure of *Occasions of Sin* depends on the attractiveness of its heroine. Rachel Billington has tried to make all this talk of sin seem worthwhile by showing Laura with the correct attributes. She is beautiful, well-dressed, illogical, men love her and

women admire her. Laura is clearly intended to embody an ideal of beautiful yet vulnerable womanhood and accepts that other people take her to be a paragon of virtue. What comes over most strongly, however, is the speciousness of these attractions, the superficial nature of Laura's feelings, and the callousness of her behaviour towards her husband and son. It is unfortunate too that the author's decision to note in detail each one of Laura's confusions and vacillations ensures that her "mysterious remoteness", remarked upon by other characters, is denied to us.

There is superficiality, too, in the way in which her affair with Martin is charted as a series of treats — compliments in hoarse whispers, wine, pincushions, lunches, trips to New York, Ireland and Italy — all equally glossy. A further irritation to many readers will be Laura's job, which is glamorous and interesting, (she) runs a small consultancy group, but which allows her plenty of time for "lovers' lunches, trips to America, Ireland, Italy and so on."

The introduction of serious themes — the religious dimension — and the way the narrative keeps breaking into the present tense to convey intimacy show that the book is meant to be taken seriously, but like the many episodes of the romantic Irish tale, it takes place in the romantic Irish tale village of Ballymore.

The hack as hero

George Mikes

RICHARD SENNETT

The Frog Who Dared to Croak
182pp. Faber. £7.95.
0 571 11989 1

This promised to be an exciting book. Richard Sennett, described by the publishers as "one of America's best known social critics" (it must be my fault that I have never heard of him) has turned to novel-writing. His hero is "the leading Marxist thinker of his time", both a great philosopher and a party hack; that is, Georg Lukács — who else? What a prospect: America's leading social critic analysing the clash between social and socialist conscience; why the genius became a hack, how the hack could remain a genius. Lukács also becomes a homosexual, which he has never been but, after all, this is a novel. After the first few pages I started feeling some doubts; then bitter disappointment; then slight anger and finally I could hardly believe that this is not a crude and silly joke.

The hero, Tibor von Grau, has homosexual affairs with a number of working class men, and this conquers him for Socialism. So much for intellectual struggle between rival philosophies. We have to take Grau's brilliance for granted: the author tells us that he is brilliant, and he must know. But Grau fails to utter one single original — or even intelligent — remark throughout the whole book. In the end, during the Hungarian Revolution he delivers a big speech, advocating a solution. Neutrality would be fatal for Hungary, the country would become the victim of two rival great powers (why this is worse than being the victim of one is not explained). The right way out is to stop fighting, stop the violence and force better terms out of the Russians for the future. This advice, mixed with cowardice was Grau's moment of wisdom and courage, when the frog dared to croak. After the defeat of the Revolution he gets into trouble because of this breathtaking step. He is sent into retirement; "Yet, miraculously, I am still alive and well."

The book also means to be a satire; indeed, according to the blurb it is "wildly funny". Grau is rounded up in a Moscow street and taken to Stalin who loves parties and wishes to be amused (by people picked up at random). Tibor is a painfully silly and wildly unfunny chat about the value of Tashkent pottery and Stalin behaves throughout like the senile headmaster of an elementary school. Further evidence of wild fun is the revival of some jokes — not even the best jokes — of a bygone era.

This is, however, not the worst. The most puzzling aspect of the novel is why an author should be writing about a system and a country of which he knows next to nothing. Almost everything he says about Hungary, her customs, attitudes and history, is false. Here are just a few of the hundreds of mistakes: the 1919 Communist Revolution, as described, vaguely resembles the situation after the Second World War, but has nothing to do with 1919. Sennett does not even know that Béla Kan was more than the Foreign Minister of the régime. Rigged trials are mentioned, but these started, even in Russia, only years later. During the pre-1956 years, according to the author, Hungary suffered more from anarchy than from despotism; He says that Gorbachev handed over power to Kádár, which he never did. Imre Nagy came between the two.

The Hungarian names he uses are not only peculiar, but sometimes impossible. It would not have been difficult to find, and consult a Hungarian in New York; indeed, it is difficult to avoid one. Sennett's Hungarians are called: Szalotus, Keeser, Borodits, Pieset, their Christian names are Pavel and Szapan. We are also taken to the woods of Csur. This is like reading a novel about England in which the English gentry all have names such as Wolfgang, Kurt and Zognew and one episode takes place in the romantic Irish tale village of Ballymore.